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J. W. Alexander

Rome 1913

BAWBEE JOCK

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BY AMY McLAREN

AUTHOR OF "WITH THE MERRY AUSTRIANS," "FROM A DAVOS BALCONY" "THE HOUSE OF BARNKIRK," ETC. ETC.

"The law of unselfishness: Not to live for the individual
But for the Divine whole: That is the will of God."

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BAWBEE JOCK

CHAPTER I

"MR. MACKENZIE!"

The butler announced the name loudly, but there was such a babel of talk and laughter resounding through the long oak-panelled hall that the advent of the new-comer passed unnoticed.

"Hawkins! Bring some more—more teacups."

The voice sounded plaintive, and rather helpless.

"Yes, madam," answered the butler, and vanished, leaving the visitor he had announced to his fate.

He stood: a tall, broad-shouldered figure, in the background, looking painfully conscious of the fact that no one was aware of his presence. His hostess was pouring out tea and talking inconsequently to a masculine-looking woman, eccentrically dressed, who was standing on the hearthrug, and who, in a strident voice, was laying down the law on a matter of sporting etiquette. Half a dozen men lounged about, smoking, and discussing the day's shoot and the prospect of to-morrow's; and in the embrasure of a window, sunk deep in the massive thickness of the walls, a small group had gathered round a table on which one of the party had collected all the cakes and eatables he could find. He was "pressing" them on the attention of a

very pretty girl, whose laughing protests he met with a running fire of commentary.

"Cookies! Scotch for buns. Shortbread! Excellent! but look out for those white dots on the top. They're none so innocent. They call them 'sweeties' here, and they're as hard as nails. Scones! My dear Angela, this is your first visit to the Land of Cakes, therefore let me warn you to pronounce that word properly. Don't call it 'scoanes'! It annoys the natives. Beauty, you lazy beggar! what do you mean by leaving your teacup on the floor for me to walk into?"

"It's empty," murmured a languid voice from the depths of an armchair. "As you're on your feet, Flossie, fetch me a fresh brew, will you?"

Flossie promptly sat down.

"It's a great mistake to be seen standing on your feet," he said. "You're always being asked to do things, and I never encourage laziness on principle."

The languid voice was raised, and drawled out:

"Don't be an ass, Flossie. You're not good-looking enough to have principles. With a face like a gong, you can't——"

A cushion spun into the air and, descending at exactly the right angle, extinguished the remainder of the sentence. The man in the chair struggled into an upright position and tucked the cushion in at his back.

"Thanks," he said—"just what I wanted." And the girl looked at him and laughed.

He was very good to look at: tall, clean-limbed, with a handsome, well-bred face. The features were almost too perfect, but about the eyes were lines which ought not to have been there. It was not the years

alone which had drawn these lines on Beauty de Burgh's face.

Flossie was a striking contrast to his companion. He was short and plump, with a smooth, round, pink face; and his appearance gave a general impression of guileless innocence. He was dressed rather fancifully, for the reason that all his women-friends helped to dress him. His stocking-tops and his waistcoat and his tie all bore witness to the fact.

Flossie seated himself on a three-legged stool, and picked out a piece of shortbread from the plate in front of him.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed, staying his hand. "Who's that?" He was short-sighted, and felt for his eye-glass.

Captain de Burgh turned his head in the direction of the door.

"Bawbee Jock!" he ejaculated.

"So it is," said Flossie. "That idiot Hawkins shoots people into the room as though he were clicking tourists through a turnstile."

"He's come for to-morrow's grouse-drive. I knew Monty had asked him," said Captain de Burgh.

"Well, my dear chap, you might go and help the poor beggar," said Flossie. "Your sister hasn't the foggiest notion that he's there."

"Dolly's the worst hostess in Christendom," answered Captain de Burgh. "Probably she's forgotten that he's been asked."

He turned his head again.

"It's all right; my good brother-in-law has gone to the rescue."

A stout red-faced man had detached himself from the group by the fire-place, and, making his way

across the hall, was seen shaking hands with the newcomer.

Flossie dropped his eye-glass. He began to nibble his shortbread, and handed the plate to the girl beside him.

Angela Tempest was watching the newcomer.

"What did you call him?" she said. "I saw him at the station, and I heard him asking about his luggage, and I felt sure that he was coming here; but the chauffeur did not wait for him. It was so stupid, because there was plenty of room in the motor."

Captain de Burgh laughed softly.

"What a sell for Bawbee Jock! He must have had to hire a 'macheen' all to himself."

"But who is he?" repeated Angela, who was accustomed to having her questions answered promptly.

"Bawbee Jock!" drawled Captain de Burgh, "otherwise John Murdoch Mackenzie of that ilk. 'Ilk' means——"

"If you're going in for Scotch definitions, you'd better swallow the dictionary," interrupted Flossie.

"Go on eating shortbread and let me finish my story," was the lazy retort.

Beauty de Burgh turned and leant a little forward.

"The young man who has aroused your interest, Miss Tempest, is our landlord—my brother-in-law's landlord, to be correct. He is the proud owner of these lordly halls. Jolly fine halls they are, too; I wish they were mine. He also owns some of the best grouse-shooting in Scotland."

"Why doesn't he live here himself?" asked Angela.

"Ah! you're a stranger in the land," broke in Flossie. "Let me initiate you into some of the peculiar characteristics of the natives. A Scotchman makes money by

saving it. Get that firmly fixed into your head and it will help you to understand a lot."

Captain de Burgh glanced across at the subject of the discussion.

"I can't see where the fun of his screwing comes in," he said. "No one seems to know why he screws. He lets nearly every acre of his ground, and lives on one of his farms on——"

"Porridge and whiskey," chimed in Flossie; "and counts his bawbees every Saturday night before he goes to bed."

Angela Tempest's brows drew together in a puzzled frown.

"What is a bawbee?" she asked.

"It's a ha'pen——" Captain de Burgh broke off suddenly.

"Hi, Flossie! What the——! Keep off my toes, can't you!"

"A bawbee, my dear Angela," ran on Flossie glibly, "if used as a prefix, means a term of respect—or—endearment, or——! But it's so much more interesting to receive information from the fountain-head, so to speak. Ask the young man himself. He will explain it better than I can."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," retorted Angela. She laughed, and looked at Captain de Burgh. "You gave it away. I know quite well what it means. Bawbee Jock! It means that he's a screw. Tell me"—she lowered her voice—"does he know that he's called Bawbee Jock?"

"Well, it's not exactly chucked at his head," said Flossie.

"He looks lonely," said Angela. "Hasn't he got any belongings?"

Flossie smiled.

"If you mean, is there a female Bawbee, or any little Bawbeelites, I answer, not to my knowledge."

"There was a brother in the Blues," interposed Captain de Burgh. "I don't know what's become of him. He chucked the service, and went off ranching to South America, or some out-of-the-way place. A good-looking boy, and he spent his money pretty freely. He wasn't a pincher like this one."

"I think you are both rather horrid," said Angela. "I should like to go and talk to Bawbee Jock, and make him feel more comfortable."

Flossie held up his finger warningly.

"My dear Angela, we all know the power of your wiles—I—I mean charms; but in this case they will not prevail. The young man abjures female society. Whether it's fright, or Scotch caution, or what, I don't know; but you might as well try to make an impression on a shortbread sweetie as on the heart of Bawbee Jock."

"Poor Bawbee Jock!" said Angela. "Look—Lady Di has swooped down on him. I'm sure he's dreadfully afraid of her."

"No wonder," murmured Captain de Burgh. "She'd frighten a scarecrow!" And his eyes strayed towards the masculine-looking lady standing on the hearthrug who had captured the new-comer, to his evident embarrassment.

Captain de Burgh's eyes came back to Angela's face and he said gravely:

"I suppose you know, Miss Tempest, that when you come out with the guns to-morrow you'll be expected to wear the same kind of thing as what Lady Di's got on. She calls it her kilt."

"Shall I?" Angela laughed; and then she looked Flossie up and down and laughed again. "That's the only thing that has disappointed me in the Highlands," she said. "I have not seen a man in a kilt yet. I expected you to meet me at the station dressed in a kilt, Flossie. Why didn't you?"

"Oh, indeed," retorted Flossie, "and be snap-shotted from the train as it was moving out of the station by some beastly newspaper correspondent."

"It needn't have been a beastly one," corrected Angela. "Perhaps some quite nice one. And he would have put you in his paper and said something interesting about you. 'Lord Francis Carleton is paying his usual round of visits in the Highlands and has adopted the national dress.' Or—or perhaps he would have mistaken you for a real chief. Oh! Flossie, think of that—a real Highland chief!"

Captain de Burgh's eyes ran slowly over Flossie's smooth pink face and plump figure.

"It would tax the imagination of even a newspaper correspondent to take you for a Highland chief," he remarked.

"Oh! they stick at nothing," answered Flossie airily. "Do you remember that time at Monte Carlo when I was helping you to recruit from the scars of battle?—the night in the smoking-room, when we surprised that mixed lot round the table where the English illustrateds were laid out?"

Flossie spread out his hands and addressed Angela.

"My dear, I rashly drew near to see what the row was about, and one of tnem spotted me and went off like a squib. There was not much *entente cordiale* in the air then. I used to look for a pro-Boer under my

bed every night. This chap, he kept on banging the table and thumping at something, and then shouting at me. He hadn't even the modesty to shout in his own language.

"'Your zoldjers! Ze are nodding but old veemans! Ze ride in ze petticoat!' he bellowed at me.

"I meekly tried to defend our forces, but he flourished the paper in my face. There it was—a gaudy illustration of a Highlander, and written underneath it, 'The Scottish Horse.' There was nothing left for me to do but look silly. I murmured something vaguely explanatory, but he only leered at me—most offensively, and said:

"'Ven ze vind blows, vat vould ze do, zese old veemens who ride in ze petticoat?'

"'They'd sit tight and let the wind blow, and swish your blooming head off if you came too near,' I answered, and walked away. No decent foreigner would have said a thing like that, but—— Ugh! By the way, Beauty, did you ever find out about that most misleading caricature, or whatever it was?"

"No; but I believe that the officers of the Scottish Horse do wear a kilt, as a sort of ball mess-dress. The paper wouldn't take the trouble to explain that."

"Well, I am very disappointed," said Angela, looking round the room. "No one is in a kilt—not even Bawbee Jock."

"I never saw him out of one before," said Captain de Burgh.

"What a funny little green coat that is of Lady Di's," continued Angela. "It's trimmed with such crowds of buttons."

"She calls that her doublet," said Flossie. "Did you ever see such a heap of buttons? I tried to

count them when she was sitting beside me at lunch and it made me feel quite giddy."

"You didn't account for many birds after lunch, I noticed," said Captain de Burgh.

Flossie rose with dignity.

"I shall take no notice of that remark," he said; "I'm going to play bridge."

Angela watched his retreating figure with smiling eyes.

"Isn't he a dear?" she said. "It's so nice to see him again."

Captain de Burgh was also watching Flossie.

"I never can quite reconcile the idea of Flossie being a guardian," he said.

"My guardian, you mean. Why?" asked Angela.

"Oh! I don't know. He's not the kind of cut of a figure for a guardian, somehow."

"I think my father must have been a very clever man to choose Flossie as my guardian," said Angela. "There is nothing Flossie can't do—if he wants to. He has been the cleverest and kindest and nicest guardian that any girl could have had."

"Well, he's unique, anyhow," admitted Captain de Burgh. "Flossie is everything that you would think by the look of him that he was not."

"Of course he is," answered Angela with asperity. "And that is what makes him so nice. Obvious people are dreadfully dull."

"He can shoot, and he's quite good on a horse, and he can talk about anything. And he's a marvellous organiser—runs people's shows for them better than they can for themselves," mused Beauty lazily. "Good old Flossie! He always does the right thing; even to going away when he's not wanted."

Angela raised her eyebrows.

"I did not wish him to go away," she said.

"Didn't you? Well, I did."

The words were spoken in a low voice, so softly that they sounded almost like a caress. Captain de Burgh drew his chair round a little further. This attitude gave the impression of isolating himself and his companion. No one understood the value of monopolising a position more thoroughly than "Beauty" de Burgh, as he was commonly called in his own set. He was a past-master in the art of wooing a woman, whether he loved her or not. But it happened that in this case he was very much in love, more so than he found at all comfortable for his peace of mind; and the fact that the object of his affection gave him no clue to the state of her feelings added enormously to her charm.

Angela leant back in her chair and drew her gloves backwards and forwards through her slim fingers and gently pulled out the creases. She listened silently to the soft caressing voice; sometimes flashing a side-glance at the speaker from under her dark lashes.

This man had persistently and systematically made love to her for a whole year; but so many other men had done the same thing. From her cradle upwards men had been her slaves. She accepted their homage unquestioningly, for she had never known a time when it had not been offered to her.

There were people who accused Angela of being a flirt. In the common sense of the word she was not, because she never angled for admiration. An innate pride and fastidiousness would have told her that it was vulgar to cheapen herself to the crowd. She did not require to do that.

Angela's friends were beginning to wonder a little what she was going to make of her life. She was twenty-one, and she was her own mistress, controller of her own destiny. She seemed as heart-whole at twenty-one as she had been at seventeen; sometimes she wondered herself what she was going to make of her life. She could not prevent men falling in love with her; and, in justice to herself, it must be said that when the inevitable happened she was always sorry.

Had she a heart, or had she not? she often asked herself. Sometimes a vague, intangible something spoke to her in a language which she could not read: spoke to her in the voice of a song, in the innocent eyes of a child, in the twilight hush of a summer's night. Sometimes she longed to love—passionately, unreasoningly; and then recoiled in shrinking terror when the thing men called love was pou out slavishly at her feet.

A shrewd, worldly-wise old man had prophesied of Angela when she was still at the stage of short frocks and pinafores: "If she marries the right man, he'll make her; if she marries the wrong one, then God help the man!"

He was still waiting to see the fulfilment of his prophecy.

CHAPTER II

DOLLY POTTER was, as her brother had remarked, a bad hostess. Not from intention, but a curious kind of vagueness characterised her actions; and she had no sense of proportion with regard to time.

She was a pretty, fragile creature; and she wore beautiful clothes, with an odd, unfinished sort of artistic untidiness, as though she had dressed in a hurry and forgotten to look at herself in the glass before she came downstairs.

At twenty minutes past the dinner hour, when the latest laggard amongst her guests was beginning to despair, she fluttered into the drawing-room, dropping confused apologies from right to left, and then came to a standstill, looking wistfully round her, as if in search of help.

"It's all right, dear lady," said a soothing voice at her elbow, and Flossie appeared with a green flower-pot under his arm. "We're making the ladies draw for who they're to take in to dinner," he said. "Only two papers left. Now, that's me—that little curled-up one in the corner. Do take it! It's so discouraging always being passed over. Thanks! so kind of you," and he whisked away the flower-pot before Dolly had time to hesitate, and presented it to Angela, who was standing close by.

"The last," he whispered; "you've no choice. I've been keeping it up my sleeve for you all the time. Don't let him see it. It's for your eye alone."

Angela unrolled the scrap of paper. "Bawbee Jock" was written across it in Flossie's neat handwriting.

Captain de Burgh was seen making his way across the room; he stopped in front of Angela.

"I hope I am the lucky man?" he said.

She shook her head gently.

The Beauty scowled.

"Silly rot, this game of Flossie's," he said crossly. "I was to take you in to dinner. Dolly knew that."

"I thought you said Flossie always did the right thing," said Angela sweetly. Her glance went past him. "Lady Di drew you, and she's always very cross when she's hungry, so I should advise you not to keep her waiting. Talk vegetarianism to her. That always soothes her."

With a little nod the Beauty found himself dismissed, and Angela stood quietly watching the oddly-assorted procession of men and women, very few of whom seemed to have been rightly paired, file past her through the folding-doors into the dining-room.

One other watcher, half-hidden in the shadow of a curtain, stood alone, and when any one approached him he drew back and flushed nervously under his deep tan. A handsome woman with sleepy eyes and a wicked mouth swept up to her host, who was standing near. With a significant "You're my boy, Monty," she put her hand through his arm and passed on. Her trailing skirts brushed the feet of the silent watcher, and the heavy perfume of scent rose to his nostrils.

He gave a sigh of relief. One by one the other couples had disappeared; the room was almost empty;

and he had not been claimed. Perhaps—and he took heart at the thought—perhaps he had been forgotten, or perhaps there were not enough women to go round.

"May I have the pleasure of taking you in to dinner?"

The low, sweet voice sounded close beside him; he started violently, and looked down into a radiant flower-like face upraised to his. The dark eyes smiled at him, and the lovely mouth which had just framed the words smiled at him also, and the little rounded chin was tilted expectantly upwards. She was waiting for him to answer; and a paralysing numbness held him tongue-tied.

"I hope that I have not made a mistake?" went on the pretty voice. "But—we're the only two left, so I think you must be—— Are you Mr. Mackenzie?"

"Yes," he stammered; and after that he did not remember very well what happened. He must have offered her his arm; for the next thing that he was conscious of was that her hand was resting on it and that they were passing through the folding-doors into the dining-room. He had a perturbed recollection afterwards of having trod on her dress when he stood back to allow an officious footman to draw out her chair, and that she said, "Oh, it doesn't matter." Then he found himself sitting at his own dinner-table in an unaccustomed place, and his surroundings were familiar, but he felt an utter stranger amongst them. The lights and the flowers and the faces were all jumbled up together in a kind of mist; and the only thing which appeared real was his mother's face, looking down at him from the painted canvas on the wall opposite.

Her eyes seemed to reproach him. There was a sad, yearning appeal in their gaze. Something gripped at

his throat—something that he choked back and tried to stifle. "I—can't do it"; and then a kind of terror seized hold upon him, for he thought he had said the words aloud.

"Please—would you mind passing me the salt? I'm so sorry to have to ask for it so often."

"I—I beg your pardon. I'm afraid I wasn't listening." Jock Mackenzie blurted out the words spasmodically.

The corners of Angela's mouth twitched. Never, in her experience of men, had one of them dared to confess that he was not listening when she spoke. It was a new sensation, and she liked new sensations. Her smile was very sweet as she glanced up into the face above her.

It was a plain face, with strongly marked features. His hair was just on that doubtful borderland between red and sandy; it was very short, and showed the suspicion of a little crimp where it was brushed back from his temples. Exposure to all weathers had tanned his skin deeply, and from out of the very brown face a pair of blue eyes met Angela's dark ones. They were curiously blue, and were fixed upon her with a concentrated intentness which was evidently characteristic of their owner.

"He's very much in earnest," murmured Angela to herself. "Poor thing! he'd be so much happier if he wasn't."

She finished her soup, and, taking a piece of toast from the little silver rack beside her plate, began to break it up slowly. Then she clasped her hands on the edge of the table-cloth and exclaimed impulsively:

"This is the first time that I have ever been in a Scotch house, and I think it is charming—quite charming."

A quick flash of pride, surprised pleasure, shone for a moment in the eyes of the man looking down at her, and then vanished.

"And your country! Your moors! All these miles and miles of heather! It is simply glorious!"

Angela was generous in her praise and impetuous of expression when her sympathies were aroused.

"I made the chauffeur drive slowly, coming from the station this afternoon—which I'm sure he did not like," she said. "And once I made him stop altogether, and I jumped out and gathered a great bunch of heather. It smelt like honey; and the colour of it! I never saw such a colour. Oh! it was all quite beautiful, and not like anything I have ever seen before."

"It's been a fine season for the heather," said Jock.

The answer amused Angela.

"You say that as if you were talking about cabbages, or green peas. Don't you love these moors? You must. How can you help it?"

The footman's arm and an *entrée* dish intervened; she did not see the effect of her words, and there was no answer.

The lack of response to her enthusiasm surprised her a little. It was so unusual to her to have an unresponsive listener, and the novelty of it stirred her sense of humour. She was saying such nice things to this young man, making herself so charming; and he did not seem to realise that quite an unusual favour was being bestowed on him.

She glanced across the table. Through a vista of flowers and candelabra and trailing smilax she caught a glimpse of Flossie's face. "I told you so!" was written plainly all over it. She looked down and bit

her lip; a sparkling light of mischief flickered under her lowered lashes.

During the half-hour which followed there was no doubt whatever that Angela Tempest used every subtle charm, every seductive art, every soft inflection of voice of which a pretty woman is mistress, for the subjugation of this big, shy, plain-featured young man. For some unaccountable reason he had aroused her interest.

How could he resist her? He would have been astonished and incredulous had he been told that any woman would think it worth her while to try to enslave him. He had a very modest opinion of himself. He was very single-minded, and entertained a diffident reverence for women. Those soft dark eyes! That low voice, which had such a delicious quality of sweetness in its vibrations! Those pretty, impulsive, sympathetic nothings which fell from her lips! They opened to him the gates of a new world and spoke to him in a new language.

His perceptions quickened, vitalised. He stole glances at her when he thought she was not looking. He realised that she was different to every other woman in the room. Man-like, he could not have told what she wore, and an elusive and subtle charm made Angela's clothes subjective to her personality; but her dress appeared to him very simple, and its simplicity pleased him. No ornaments spoilt the lovely curves of her neck and arms; they were soft and white and rounded as a child's. The only thing that he could have described about her definitely, was the bit of sky-blue ribbon which twisted with fascinating inconsequence in and out of her dark hair. It had a fluttery end, which almost brushed his shoulder when she

moved her head, and there was something about that bit of blue ribbon which made him feel that he had known it all his life. A beautiful ancestress of his own, whose portrait hung in the hall, was painted with a blue ribbon in her hair; and often in his boyish days he had stood underneath the picture and shyly adored the proud beauty who looked scornfully down on her plain little descendant.

He could not have analysed his sensations or described how they affected him; he only knew that she was different to any woman he had ever seen or that his imagination had pictured. Everything she did and said and looked and was, was vitally distinctive of herself. He saw her through the glamour of the spell which she had thrown over him.

When she rose from the table she made him a little mocking bow and left him with some pretty words ringing in his ears. They meant, "Till we meet again"; and his eyes followed her as she passed out through the folding-doors.

There was a very sulky expression on Captain de Burgh's handsome face as he opened the door for the ladies to leave the dining-room.

"I hope you have had a pleasant time," he said to Angela, as she passed out.

"Very," she answered. And it did not improve his temper to find, when he entered the drawing-room later, that she appeared serenely unaware that he was cross. She ignored his attempts to monopolise her society. Some exuberant spirits started playing childish games, and she allowed herself to be drawn into their circle, and played as happily as a little girl at her first party.

Flossie was the ringleader of the revels. He did not

take any important part in them himself; he suggested, and started them, and then looked on.

"Oh, Flossie, I'm so hot!" pleaded Dolly after half an hour's violent exercise. She sank exhausted into a chair. "Do think of a game that makes us sit still."

Flossie looked round on the dishevelled remnants of his band; the only one who remained cool and unruffled was Angela.

"Get out the roulette board, and hand me that black velvet bag," said Lady Di in her strident voice; and Flossie did as he was told.

"Old harridan!" he murmured to Angela. "She cleaned us all out last night."

Angela drew in her chair to the table; there was a vacant seat beside her and she glanced over her shoulder.

"Mr. Mackenzie, won't you come and play?" she said.

Jock had not joined in the games, but Angela was quite aware of the fact that he had been watching her. She laid her hand on the vacant seat.

"Please," she said softly.

The colour rushed up to his temples.

"I—I don't play," he said.

She still kept her hand on the chair.

"You need not play. Look on, and wish me luck."

He hesitated, and was lost.

"I'm afraid I'll be no use," he said as he sat down. "I'm not a lucky person."

"Perhaps you will be lucky when you are wishing me luck. You shall stake for me"; and she glanced up into his face and laughed. It was such a pretty laugh. It sent all kinds of odd thrills running through his veins, and that fluttering end of ribbon was almost touching

his shoulder again. The grey, dull, emotionless self—the self which rigid discipline had almost ground him down to be what he appeared to be—slipped momentarily from him. A smile lit up his face. It transformed the plain features so magically that Angela gave a little gasp of astonishment. She turned her head aside quickly; swift compunction, a sharp unreasoning pity for she knew not what, brought the tears to her eyes. She could not have explained to herself what the feeling meant; she thrust it away from her quickly.

"Flossie, do begin! What are we waiting for?" she cried, and then added, "Mr. Mackenzie is going to stake for me, and we're going to win everything—aren't we?"

She laid a small jewelled purse on the table and pushed it towards him.

"What am I to do with it?" he asked.

"Count how much there is inside," she answered; and he obeyed. To unfasten the clasp, to handle a thing which belonged entirely and exclusively to herself, gave him a kind of fearful joy.

He laid the money out on the green cloth. There was very little, and she touched each coin with the tips of her fingers. He noticed what pretty hands she had, and she wore no rings.

"My"—she hesitated—"my b-bawbēēs," she said, with a soft stammer.

Jock's eyes fixed her with that look of intensity.

"I did not think you would have known the meaning of that word," he said.

She shook her head, and the blue ribbon fluttered.

"Perhaps I don't."

"But—you must! You used it right," he said.

"It's time to stake," she answered quickly. "You choose a number, and be sure and bring me luck."

The wheel spun its round. Time after time Angela's stake was risked; time after time she saw her little pile swept away and added to some one else's pile, until she had staked her all, and lost.

Flossie was holding the bank. She stretched out her hand and asked him to lend her some money.

"Sorry I can't oblige you," he said, "but Lady Di's broke the bank."

"What a shame! I did so want to win back," she exclaimed, appealing to the man who was watching her, and who was miserably conscious of the fact that it was he who had brought her her bad luck.

"Let me be your banker!" he said impulsively.

Excitement had brought a lovely colour to her cheeks. She nodded and smiled.

"How nice of you!" she answered. "We'll have one more gamble. How much shall it be? A big one?"

He took a small handful of loose silver from his pocket.

"That's all I have on me," he said.

"We'll stake it at one go," she cried recklessly. "I'll choose the number this time. Now, watch!"

Whiz! Round spun the needle. It slowed, wavered, gave a final quiver, and stopped on the number next to Angela's.

"How perfectly maddening!" she exclaimed. She spread out her hands, palms uppermost. "What shall I do? All my money gone! All my savings lost!" She made a rueful grimace. "Bankrupt! I shall have to wear cleaned gloves and travel third class for the next six months. Isn't it awful?"

"I'm so sorry," he said remorsefully. "It was all my fault. I ought not to have allowed you to make me your 'luck.'"

"Oh! that was my own doing; I took the risk," she answered. "How much do I owe you? I forgot to count."

"Never mind," he answered hastily. "I lost all yours first, you know. You put on for me that last time. We're quits."

"Partners in misfortune," she laughed.

"Partners," he repeated after her slowly.

Glenmoira was an old house, and had not as yet been modernised by electricity or any other up-to-date mode of lighting. Good-nights were exchanged round a long table in the hall, on which was laid out a glittering row of bedroom candlesticks.

"Take care and don't dribble the grease on the stair-carpet," said Flossie, as he handed Angela her candlestick. "It's so bad for the housemaid's morals."

"You're a very bad lighter of candles," retorted Angela, paying no attention to his remark. "Mine has gone out already."

They were standing quite at the end of the long table, and beyond it the hall was in shadow.

Flossie scratched a match, and Angela blew it out with a soft little "poof." He put the match-box in his pocket.

"Very well," he said, "you can go to bed in the dark, and there's a ghost! It walks about with its head under its arm. It will serve you jolly well right if it walks into your room. Your behaviour this evening has been scandalous! I blushed for you all through dinner, and afterwards! The way you rooked Bawbee Jock!"

"Flossie!" remonstrated Angela.

"May the ghosts of his ancestors haunt your slumbers,"

murmured Flossie ; and, slipping past her, he picked up his candlestick and disappeared.

Angela turned, to find the man of whom they had been speaking standing close beside her. He must have heard their remarks. If she had had any hopes that he had not, her first glance at his face undeceived her. She was beginning to understand what that look in the blue eyes meant. Its directness was disconcerting.

"Do they call me that?" he said, with an odd jerk in his voice.

Angela flushed.

"People are never given nick-names unless they're—unless they're liked," she said hurriedly.

"Do you know why they call me that?" he asked.

"I——" she caught her breath quickly. Then she raised her head ; the light danced in her eyes and the corners of her mouth trembled. "B-bawbee! Don't you think it's a dear little name?" she said. "I do—I like it! I think—I think 'Bawbee Jock' sounds very pretty."

She had saved the situation. That rare swift smile flashed across the plain face and transformed it almost to beauty. The colour mounted again to his temples.

"It does when you say it," he answered.

Upstairs in her own room Angela sat in front of her looking-glass and regarded herself with a frown puckering her brow. She wore a long white dressing-gown and her hair had been brushed out for the night.

"You can go to bed, Antoinette," she said in French to a tall woman in black, who was standing in the background. And Antoinette, whom a midnight journey and a long motor-drive had made cross as well as sleepy, accepted her mistress's dismissal without demur.

Angela was not at all sleepy. She sat on, her chin resting on her clasped hands, and began to talk to her own reflection. She had a childish trick of holding conversation with herself; she sometimes did it unconsciously.

"It's quite true what Flossie said—you've been behaving scandalously! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! You've been—flirting! You've never done such a thing before, and you don't know why you did it. 'Bawbee Jock.'" She murmured the name softly under her breath; then she paused, and frowned at the eyes which looked back at her. "It—was like hurting a child to play with him the way you did. And you did play! You played deliberately. Why did you do it?"

Yes, why had she done it? It was a question she could not answer. Had she been prompted by piqued vanity? a whimsical curiosity to find out if she had limitations? No! If something in this man's personality had not interested her, she would have left him alone. There was nothing small in Angela's nature. The satisfaction of a petty triumph would not have appealed to her.

"I hope you will be punished as you deserve," she said to the face in the glass. She finished her undressing and, blowing out the candles, jumped into bed in a hurry because she suddenly remembered Flossie's threats of ghostly terrors, and fell into a dreamless, untroubled sleep, whilst the object of her reflections stood at the open window of his room on the floor above, and, looking out across the wide moorlands to where a pale glow lightened the northern sky, wondered if a new heaven and a new earth had been born for him since the rising of that morning's sun.

He raised his arms above his head and stretched his

limbs, like a man who longs to rid himself of some weary burden.

"If I were free! If I could only see the end of it! If it was my own hand I was fighting for!" he murmured.

He dropped his arms; the hopelessness of finality was in the gesture.

"It's like pouring water into a sieve! I never felt the grind of it so badly before."

He moved away from the window to the dressing-table, and turned out his pockets. His expression softened.

"'Rooked me'—that's what that little man they call Flossie said. She didn't. She wanted to pay me back, and she's poor. 'Bankrupt! All my savings gone!' That was what she said; and it was only a few shillings that she lost. It must be rough on a girl to go about amongst that lot and be poor, and have to keep up with them."

He wound up his watch and put it under his pillow. That night his sleep was haunted by a confused medley of strange dreams. In and out of each fleeting phantasy, and playing hide-and-seek with his elusive grasp, fluttered a wisp of blue ribbon. He woke with the dawn creeping through the open window, to find that it was—only a dream.

CHAPTER III

"I AM starving! I could eat anything."

"For goodness' sake, Angela, don't fix me with that hungry glare, as if you wanted to eat me!"

Flossie skipped nimbly out of reach.

"My dear girl," he said, shaking the skirts of his shooting-coat, which was very frilly below the waist and bulged with pockets above, "do I look as if I'd got a haggis, or a bannock, or any other of the vile comestibles of this heathen land hidden about me? You make me feel quite nervous. Don't look like that."

Angela clapped her hands together impatiently.

"Feed me at once!" she cried. "What is inside that delicious-looking brown pot? It smells so good. I never thought walking on heather could be so exhausting. I feel as if I had been running in a Marathon race."

Flossie plunged a long spoon into the hot-pot.

"Beauty, hand over those plates and make yourself useful, will you?" he said. "I'm so tired of seeing you standing about doing nothing. What put you off your shooting this morning?"

"I drew a bad number to begin with, and I've had no luck," grumbled the Beauty.

He handed Angela her plate, and after supplying her

with everything that she required, brought his own and sat down beside her.

The spot was an ideal one for a shooting-picnic. A hollow in the hillside gave shelter from the sun and wind, and a little stream, bubbling out from the grey rock above, had burrowed a bed for itself in the peaty soil. On every side stretched the moor, the purple heather basking hot in the sunshine. Down the sloping shoulder of a low hill at the back could be seen the line of butts which the shooters had just vacated.

"These big drives are a nuisance, if they're not properly managed," grumbled the Beauty, taking a long, thirsty pull at his glass. "Monty Potter knows as much about grouse-driving as he does about the outside of a horse, and that's not much." He lifted his glass again to his lips, and set it down empty. "He thinks it's the swagger thing to take a moor. I believe he hates it really."

"I suppose it's a very good moor?" said Angela. Her gaze wandered to the great stretches of purple. "It's beautiful—quite beautiful! It seems horrid to want to eat when everything is so lovely."

The Beauty continued to grumble.

"Monty's got thirteen guns out to-day. A rotten bad lot the most of them are, too."

"Who are all these men?" asked Angela. "They're not stopping in the house. I don't recognise half of them."

Captain de Burgh glanced round carelessly.

"The man who rents the next shooting has brought over his party," he said. "That's what Monty likes: a crowd, and a big fat lunch. Such a waste of a place; it's never properly shot."

"Does he always come up here?" asked Angela.

The Beauty nodded.

"He's got the place on lease. I expect it makes Bawbee Jock rather sick to see what a nice muddle Monty makes of things. Bawbee Jock may be what he likes, but he's a rattling good shot—a sportsman through and through."

Angela looked at the Beauty with a kinder expression in her eyes than she usually favoured him with.

"It is nice of you to say that," she said. "I like to hear men say generous things of each other."

Beauty began to look sentimental, and she changed the subject hastily.

"I want something more to eat," she said, "and I don't know what to choose. There seems to be such mountains of food. No wonder you chaffed Flossie about not shooting well after lunch."

It was certainly a luxuriously appointed lunch which was spread out on the long tables set up on the green plateau in the hollow of the hillside. They groaned under the weight of every luxury which the skill of a French chef could evolve. In the background, beside the bubbling stream, stood a large ice-tub, and the heads of champagne bottles glinted over its side; and on the grass beside it lay more bottles, large and small. In attendance hovered a flock of very English-looking men-servants, who appeared strangely out of keeping with the scenery.

Neither the host nor the hostess seemed to be taking any particular responsibility with regard to their guests. Occasionally Dolly Potter's voice was raised plaintively.

"Flossie! Colonel Leach wants to know about this caviare. Where does it come from? Flossie! Lady Di says that eggs aren't allowed in her vegetarian list—

they turn into chickens, you know; and Hawkins has put some in her salad sauce. And, Flossie——"

Angela caught hold of the flapping end of Flossie's waistband as he was passing and pulled him up with a jerk.

"Sit down!" she said peremptorily. "You haven't eaten a single morsel of lunch yet. Never mind these nasty, greedy people. It will do them good to clamour for what they can't get."

"But they'll keep on clamouring," groaned Flossie.

"Never mind. Turn your back on them and don't listen."

Flossie was made to sit down on the heather. He took off his cap and mopped his forehead with a mauve silk pocket-handkerchief.

"You poor dear," said Angela, "you are hot! There!" and she placed on his knee a plate of grouse pie which had just been handed to her. "Get him something to drink," she said, turning to Captain de Burgh.

Flossie picked up a knife and fork and attacked the pie.

"What was Lady Di making such a fuss about?" asked Angela.

"About how long it would take for a hard-boiled egg to turn into a chicken," mumbled Flossie with his mouth full of pie. "Lord! I wouldn't be a vegetarian for a monkey-full of nuts. She's sitting there gloating over a beastly-looking mess of lettuce and cucumber and radishes, and the devil knows what. You should have seen her offering some to that old gourmet Leach. He looked at it with rather a pinched smile and said he was afraid his salad days were over. Ugh!" Flossie grunted. "She went on munching. The kind of stuff

you'd imagine Nebuchadnezzar devouring with his claws."

"I believe old Leach is trying to marry her," said Beauty. "She's got pots of money. Do you think he knows about number one and number two? Number one ran off with the cook, and number two——"

"O Lord! he was an out-and-out loony," chimed in Flossie. "If you went to call, you found him mowing the lawn in a pot hat and pyjamas. He said he had something the matter with his inside."

"So would you, if you were fed on lime-juice and radishes," murmured Beauty. "He died—that was Edwin. When it was full moon he used to chuck all the china out of the drawing-room window, and then go to bed and say there had been an earthquake."

Angela laughed.

"Poor Lady Di!" she said. "She always used to think it was her duty to tell Flossie how he ought to bring me up. Didn't she, Flossie? And it made you so cross, especially when she talked about your not understanding the duties of a mother."

"Dried-up old stick!" growled Flossie. "What did she know about mothers? Never heard the cheep of a chicken of her own!"

"Flossie, what are you going to do with that merry-thought?" said Angela. "Do pull it with me."

Flossie held out the merry-thought, and Angela, giving it a little pull, snapped off the bigger end.

"There!" she said gaily. "You can prepare for my wedding."

"I never go to weddings," said Flossie. "People's emotions get so fizzy. I might be kissed by mistake."

"Well, you wouldn't be kissed on purpose, anyhow," said the Beauty. "Give me a cigarette, Flossie. Thanks!

I wonder how long this orgy is going to last?" He looked at his watch. "Half-past two. We'll be lucky if we get in another couple of drives."

"Oh well, it's a ladies' innings," said Flossie. "They're all coming into the butts after lunch."

Captain de Burgh turned to Angela, and dropping his voice to the low, persuasive tone which he generally found so irresistible, said, "You will come into my butt with me, won't you?"

"What does that mean?" she answered. "What am I expected to do? I've never been out on a day like this before, you know."

Captain de Burgh proceeded to explain, but Angela was either not listening attentively or else he was not making his subject sufficiently interesting, for in the middle of one of his most careful descriptions, she exclaimed suddenly:

"Flossie, do go and save that poor man. Mrs. Devereux has got hold of him." She flushed up. "Horrid woman! why is she here?"

The sleepy-eyed woman with the wicked mouth, who had borne off her host the night before with such scant ceremony, was sitting a little distance away, and Jock Mackenzie was sitting next to her.

Captain de Burgh followed the direction of Angela's gaze.

"I suppose she made Monty ask her," he said.

"Why didn't Dolly say she wouldn't have her?" answered Angela hotly.

The Beauty shrugged his shoulders.

"No good," he said.

Flossie was still eating, and taking no share in the conversation. Angela appealed to him again.

"Flossie, I insist upon you helping that poor

thing. She's trying to make him drink ch[illegible] brandy, and he's too polite to say he doesn't want t[illegible]

The Beauty laughed drily.

"Leave him alone, Flossie. The Devereux is an excellent instructress of ingenuous youth. Bawbee Jock might learn a few useful lessons from her."

But Angela looked at Flossie, and Flossie rose and, shaking some crumbs from his shooting-coat, made a step in the direction of the group opposite, and then paused.

"What do you want me to do?" he said. "I can't go up to Bawbee Jock and say, 'Miss Tempest thinks it isn't good for your morals to drink cherry brandy with a lady whose chequered past—ahem!' If I don't go into particulars, he won't see the point! He's Scotch, you see."

"Bring him here," said Angela peremptorily. "Tell him—oh, tell him anything!"

Flossie moved away and she turned to Captain de Burgh.

"I wonder if you could find my coat for me?" she said. "It was put into the lunch-cart, I think."

Beauty stood up.

"I'll fetch it," he said. "And remember! you have promised to come into my butt with me."

Angela laughed.

"Indeed, I have not promised to do anything of the kind. I never make rash promises."

Captain de Burgh found the coat, but when he came back Angela was not where he had left her. He looked round. At a short distance from the luncheon-tables the game had been laid out on the heather. Round it several gillies and loaders were loitering, waiting for the party to move on, and keeping a watchful

eye on the guns and cartridge-bags which were lying ready for the next drive.

Angela was standing between Jock Mackenzie and an old man in rough grey homespun. The old man was evidently amusing her, for Beauty heard her light laugh and saw that her face was sparkling with animation.

He laid the coat on the heather and sat down beside it. He was offended, and he intended to show her that he was offended. He struck a match sulkily and lit a fresh cigarette.

Angela was talking eagerly to the old gillie. The soft air, blowing across the moor, had ruffled her hair and brought a lovely colour to her cheeks. Jock looked down at her with shy, proud pleasure. He did not quite know how it came about that she was there, but it gratified him very much; and she had singled out old Donald for her preference.

"Do make him go on talking," she was pleading. "I've never heard Gaelic spoken before, and it sounds so funny! As though he were scolding dreadfully hard. Is he cross? Is he angry with me for laughing?"

"Oh no, he is not angry," said Jock; "he's only trying to explain something." And he said a few words to the old man, whic' made Angela exclaim quickly:

"Why, you can talk it too!"

Jock laughed. It was a hearty, boyish laugh, which was as much a surprise to Angela as had been that sudden, swift smile of the evening before.

"It's my native tongue," he said. "When I was a little chap—oh, until I was nearly ten—I could hardly speak English. My father liked us to talk Gaelic." His voice softened. "My father was a very staunch

Highlander. Donald!" he said, addressing the old man, "this lady has never been in the Highlands before, and she doesn't understand the Gaelic. You must speak to her in your best English and welcome her to Glenmoira."

Donald dragged off his Scotch bonnet with nervous eagerness and gave an odd bob of his grey head. He peered at Angela from under his thick brows. His eyes had the curious inner glow in their depths so characteristic of the Celt; as though he were looking beyond the now to the unseen.

"It will be a goot welcome that I will be giving; and it is proud that I am to welcome such a beautiful lady to the glens, whatever."

When he spoke in English, his voice had a soft, sing-song plaint in its tone which was peculiarly sweet.

Angela clapped her hands like a delighted child.

"What a pretty speech!" she exclaimed. "Donald! Did you call him Donald?" And Jock acquiesced silently. "Thank you, Donald!" she cried, and she took the horny old hand in hers and shook it warmly. "I never had such a pretty speech made to me before—never! I think your glens are beautiful—quite beautiful."

Her quick, English-speaking voice puzzled the old man. He looked at Jock questioningly. There was a kind of dog-like, trusting devotion in the look. Then his eyes went back to Angela's face and rested there. The wind caught his grey locks and blew the hair back from his forehead, and he raised his hand with a gesture of prophetic solemnity.

"It will be to the glens that you haf come, and it will be in the glens that you will stay, and it is our chief, Glenmoira himself whatever, that will be knowing that it is true."

He lifted his eyes to the sky and then looked down, and stood motionless.

Angela moved a little nearer to Jock, who was watching Donald curiously.

"What does he mean?" she asked in a hushed voice.

Jock roused himself.

"It's just his way of expressing himself," he said hurriedly. "It—it was part of the welcome."

"His chief! Glenmoira himself! What did he mean by that?" persisted Angela. Then a light flashed into her eyes. "Are you Glenmoira? Are you? Yes, I know! I remember! Of course! Highlanders are called after the names of their places, aren't they?"

"Well, it's a kind of necessity," Jock hastened to explain. "There are so many of us of the same name, that one has to make some kind of distinction."

"I see," said Angela; and she looked round: at the hills, and the great expanse of moor stretching to where it met the low line of the horizon. "Is all this Glenmoira?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered slowly; and she did not ask any more questions. There was something in his voice which told her that it hurt him to speak of Glenmoira.

The luncheon party had now broken up and was beginning to scatter in the direction of the line of butts on the slope of the hill.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Angela.

"I believe we are to shoot from the same line of butts as we did before," said Jock. "The beaters have been bringing the birds back whilst we were at lunch."

"What a lot of fussing and arranging it seems to take," said Angela, glancing at a group in front of them, in which Lady Di was the centre figure.

A gleam of humour, swift and fleeting, lit up Jock's face.

"It is a ladies' drive," he said.

"You mean that we are going into the butts with the men?" she answered.

"Yes." He seemed to hesitate, and then added: "I—I suppose you've made your choice? I mean—you've arranged who you are going with?"

"No, I have not," answered Angela, without a moment's hesitation.

"Will you come with—me?"

The words were out before he realised the magnitude of his own audacity.

"May I?" she answered. "But shouldn't I be in your way? I know nothing about it."

"Oh no, you would not be in the way. I shall feel very much honoured if you will come into my butt with me."

Jock bent his head a little, and spoke with a simple old-fashioned courtesy which sat very well on him. Then he turned and said something to Donald, who brought him his gun and cartridge-bag.

Donald looked at Angela and muttered something.

"He's not pleased with me," she said.

Jock smiled.

"Not that. But he thinks I can't get on without him."

"Why?"

"He's been loading for me, you see, all morning. If you have two guns out, you can't get on without a loader. The birds come over at such a pace that you have to be very quick to get your double shots in, in front and behind."

"Then I shall be in the way," exclaimed Angela. "You want him much more than you want me."

"Oh no!" protested Jock quickly. "I don't want him. I'd much rather—I——" He broke off. "I'm only going to take one gun."

"Can't I help?" said Angela, still uncertain. "Do let me help. I love to learn how to do things—real things, that mean something."

Her comradeship was very sweet—dangerously sweet; the colour deepened under Jock's tan.

"You could hand me my cartridges," he said—"that helps a lot. I'll give you the bag when we get into the butt and show you what to do."

"I'll do exactly what you tell me," she answered eagerly. She drew in a long breath. "It's all so new and interesting and real. I think I'm going to love the Highlands more than any place I've ever been in before."

"I'm so glad," he said.

The big party had now formed itself into some kind of order, and Angela and Jock moved slowly on to join it. As they passed the place where the luncheon-tables had been laid out, they came upon a straggling group of laggards, and Angela heard Flossie in dulcet tones inviting Mrs. Devereux to come with him into his butt.

"Why did you do that?" she asked, as he overtook her a few seconds later. "You know you can't bear her!"

"My dear," he answered, glancing cautiously over his shoulder, "it was such a good opportunity. I have to ask her once in a way, as a penance for my reputation. She'd say such catty things about me, if I didn't; and as I had just heard her accept Monty's invitation to go into his butt, I seized the opportunity of a rebuff. Who are you going with? Beauty has

marched off by himself with a suicidal expression on his face, and he's boned my cigarette case, the beggar!"

"I've been invited by——" Angela inclined her head ever so slightly. Jock had walked on a few paces when he saw that her attention had been claimed.

Flossie's eyebrows nearly disappeared into the little fluff of down above his forehead, which he called hair.

"Do you mean to say that Bawbee Jock has asked you into his butt?"

"Yes," said Angela demurely.

"Ye gods! 'Pon my word, Angela, it's a quick thing! I shall write a comic tragedy in three acts, and call it *The Taming of the Screw.*"

Angela stamped her foot impatiently.

"Be quiet, Flossie!" she exclaimed. "He isn't a screw! I know he isn't. I think you are quite, quite horrid."

She turned away indignantly. Jock heard his name called, and he stopped and came back to her side.

"Why did you desert me?" she said, with a petulant prog of her stick in the heather.

"I thought you wanted to talk to—Lord Francis," said Jock. "You know him very well, don't you?"

Jock's pleasure at being recalled was obvious. It somehow appeased Angela's wrath.

"Yes, I know him very well," she answered. A smile rippled over her face, and her petulant mood vanished. "He is my guardian—at least, well, I suppose I am my own guardian now, because I am twenty-one. But Flossie will always go on taking care of me. I never remember the time when he did not. He is a kind of relation. My father loved him just like a brother, and I had no other relations, so he left me to Flossie. I am very relationless: I have no one but Flossie."

They walked on for a few minutes in silence, and then Angela said softly:

"Flossie talks great nonsense, you know, and people think that he is just a frivolous little butterfly; but he is not. He has the kindest, tenderest heart in the world. He——" She did not finish her sentence and her gaze went on ahead.

Flossie had run past and made up to a group walking on in front. Dolly Potter's voice, with its plaintive note of helplessness, which seemed part of herself, was borne back on the breeze.

"What a lot of things are—no use," Angela remarked irrelevantly, after a pause.

She did not expect Jock to understand. He did, so far as to know that something had touched the brightness of her mood with a wave of sadness. He would like to have shown her that he knew, but words did not come readily to him.

Angela changed the subject.

"What funny-looking things!" she said, pointing to the butts, to which they had now drawn near. "Do let me choose which one we go into! Have I said anything stupid?" she added.

"Oh no!" he said. "But I'm afraid we've no choice. The butts are numbered, you see. You ballot for your place in the morning, and then you go down two places each drive, so you never get the same butt twice. It makes it fairer. Some places are better than others."

Angela nodded.

"I see. I want you to tell me all about it. Now, which is our butt? for it seems to me that they are all being snapped up and we shall be left out. I want to begin at once."

"I'm afraid we shall have to have patience," said

Jock. "We may have to wait for a bit yet until the beaters get round."

His eyes narrowed and took that look of concentrated intensity which Angela was beginning to understand. They seemed to take in everything—from the patch of heather at his feet, to where the hills above Glenmoira cut their jagged outline against the misty blue of the August sky.

"Perhaps we had better take our places," he said. "You haven't much of a climb. That is our butt—there!" He pointed with his finger. "It's the best place I've had to-day."

"Ah! perhaps I've brought you luck," said Angela gaily. "It will make up for last night."

The half-hour of waiting did not seem long to either of them. There was so much to learn on Angela's part, and the task of teaching her was so sweet. Perhaps she taught Jock as much as he taught her: taught him that it was quite a mistake to suppose that heaven always dwelt up beyond the blue of the sky. Heaven came down to earth at times, and could dwell in a cramped little hole with a turf wall round it. A shooting-butt could make a paradise of its own.

Jock showed her how to hold his cartridges, with the ends towards him, so that he could slip them easily into his gun, and she insisted upon having the cartridge-bag slung over her shoulder, although he told her that it was too heavy.

"But I will have it so," she declared. "I am sure Donald would wear it over his shoulder, and I am Donald. And you!—you are—Glenmoira whatever!"

She mimicked the old gillie's soft drawl, and Jock thought he had never seen anything so pretty as her lips when she said the word "Glenmoira."

"I don't think you ought to take off your gloves," he said. "The cartridges may make your fingers dirty."

"Donald would not wear gloves," she answered indignantly. "And—'muffled cats can't hunt.' Don't you know that proverb?"

When the cries of the beaters were heard, her excitement grew intense.

"I shall drop the cartridges," she half whispered—"I know I shall! My fingers are beginning to shake already."

"Oh no, you won't," he said reassuringly. And when the birds began to come overhead, with a great rush of strong wings, she saw a sharp, keen glint come into his eyes, and a feeling of complete confidence in him banished her sense of nervousness.

He took up his position easily: he never missed his chance, bringing down his bird cleanly and neatly. When the gillies came to pick up the game, theirs was the biggest count.

"Isn't it splendid!" said Angela. "I am so glad. I was so afraid I would spoil sport for you."

"Spoil it! You helped more than half. You were so quick. You're the best loader I've ever had!" exclaimed Jock with a burst of enthusiasm which was very unusual to him.

The colour in Angela's cheeks deepened. She thanked him for his praise, not in words, but with her eyes.

When the day's work was over, they walked home together across the moor; for Angela said that she was not tired, and refused to be driven back with the rest of the shooting-party.

"I should love to walk," she said to Jock frankly. "And of course you will know the way, and we can cut off the corners."

It filled Jock with a tremulous joy to think that she should wish to stay with him, that she should ask him to be her guide. And yet it seemed natural and simple that they should be together. Angela was like a child who had found a playmate that she liked to play with ; and as they breasted the long sweeping slopes of heather, or scrambled down some rocky bank, or crossed and recrossed the brawling stream, there was something at every turn of the way which called for interest.

They found a wounded grouse, which Jock mercifully killed ; and the little incident gave rise to his telling her things about birds and their habits which she had never given a thought to before. Her quick, eager sympathy led him on from one subject to another, until he lost his shyness in her presence and showed her glimpses of his real self—the self which he was only dimly conscious of possessing.

She marvelled as she listened, for she was seeing through the eyes of one who had lived so close to Nature that her mantle seemed to have fallen upon him. A clean, pure wholesomeness, a simplicity of strength, marked this man out as different from any man she had ever met before.

When they came to the low turf-wall which bounded the edge of the moor above the house, Jock gave her his hand to help her over. From the top she looked down at him and shook her head and laughed.

" I'm going to sit here for a little while and rest," she said. She settled herself comfortably on a dry sod and planted her heels firmly into the soft soil. " I don't feel ready to go in yet," she said confidentially. " They will all be at tea, and there will be such a chattering and smell of hot things : cigarettes, and whiskeys-and-sodas—like yesterday, when I arrived. Here it is so

heavenly, so sweet and fresh—and wild! What is it that smells so sweet? Not the heather—something different: a wild, sweet smell."

Jock had taken the cartridges out of his gun and leant it against the wall. He went back a few steps, and picking some sprigs of green from a low shrubby plant, brought them to her.

"Yes, that's it," she said. "It has such a spicy smell."

"It's the bog-myrtle," he said. "*Roid* we call it in Gaelic."

She tried to say the word after him, rolling out the *r* with exaggerated broadness.

"I should very soon learn to speak Gaelic, shouldn't I?" she said. "What a nice day it has been! Everything has been nice! I don't think I ever learnt so many interesting things in one day before."

He was standing close beside her, resting his arms on the top of the turf-wall; the western sunlight was shining full on his face."

"I am glad that you have had a good day," he said. "And—that you like Glenmoira."

"I love it," she answered.

She was silent for a few moments, and then she broke out impetuously:

"How can you bear to let other people have it? I couldn't if it was mine—I simply couldn't! To see a—a Cockney stockbroker ordering about your people, and—— Oh, it's hateful! How can you stand it? I couldn't."

"It means money," he said slowly. He was staring straight out in front of him and did not turn his head.

She had forgotten the conversation of the day before, and Captain de Burgh's slighting remarks about his

brother-in-law's landlord; now the remembrance of what he had said rushed back to her with a significance which roused her to sudden anger against the man beside her. It was true, then! He was disloyal to his place and his people. And it was for the sake of money—for the mere love of it.

"I can't think how you can let another man take the position you ought to take," she exclaimed, flushing hotly.

Jock kept his head still averted.

"He gets what he wants, and—I get what I want," he said.

"Money," said Angela scornfully.

"Money," he repeated.

The scorn in her voice hurt him. He longed for just one word of understanding, one glance of sympathy. He picked off a bit of dry turf from the wall and crumbled it down through his fingers.

"Of course I know what you think," he said in a low voice. "You think that I am what they say—a screw."

"I don't know what I think," she retorted. She felt angry with herself for having led the conversation into its present vein. All the little chaffing trifles which she had laughed over with Flossie and Captain de Burgh came back to irritate and annoy her.

Jock forced himself to look at her at last, and his eyes met hers steadily.

"I must get money somehow. There's a reason," he said slowly. "I don't want you to misunderstand—it hurts."

He saw the scorn die out of her face. She flushed, and bending down, for she was above him, she said gently:

"I am so glad you told me. I won't misunderstand now. It—it is very nice of you to trust me."

CHAPTER IV

As Angela had predicted, there was a great deal of noise and chattering going on round the tea-table in the hall as they entered—so much so that the tardy appearance of the late-comers caused no question, and they passed in almost unnoticed. Captain de Burgh was one of the few who did notice. He felt that Angela had treated him very badly and that he had a just cause for grievance. All the same, he could not keep away from her.

Angela did not feel very penitent, but her manner was gracious to him when he followed her up the long room to the bow window where she had sat the previous afternoon.

"I hope you have come to ask me if I want some tea," she said. "I do! Please may I have it here?"

She had dismissed Jock, on entering, with a smile, which bewildered him a good deal and left him wondering what it meant.

"I hope you had a pleasant walk home," said the Beauty. He sat down at the table which he had drawn in beside her chair, and placed his cup on it, close to hers.

"Very, and I've learnt such a lot of interesting things—about grouse, and—oh! all kinds of other things."

Captain de Burgh looked at the bunch of bog-myrtle which was tucked into the buckle of her waistband.

"I see you've got some of that stuff." He dropped his voice. "Won't you give me a bit? I think you might be a little kind. You treated me very badly in breaking your promise to come into my butt; and I took care of your coat for you. I brought it back."

"Thank you so much; but I did not break a promise, because I never made one."

She took no notice of his remark about the bog-myrtle and changed the conversation by drawing his attention to a portrait hanging on the wall opposite.

"What a lovely picture!" she said. "Isn't she a beauty? Her dress is so charming. Look how the light falls on the white satin of her train. It's so funny the way fashions come round again. Do you see the blue ribbon twisted in and out of her hair? I wore a ribbon in my hair like that last night."

"Yes, she is a beauty," said Captain de Burgh, turning his head lazily. "One of Bawbee Jock's great-great-grandmothers, I suppose. Pity she has not passed her good looks on to him."

Angela took no notice of his speech. She was studying the portrait attentively.

"It would make a lovely subject for a tableau," she remarked presently. An idea struck her. "Why should we not get up tableaux this evening? I heard some one saying that the people who came over to shoot were stopping to dine. Dolly will want some amusement for them."

"You won't find men wanting to dress up for tableaux after a day's grouse-driving," said Beauty.

"But I want to dress up myself," retorted Angela. "Those who don't want to, can look on. Flossie!"

She raised her voice. "Come here! We are inspired with a brilliant idea. Come and help us to work it out."

Flossie sank down into the chair she pushed towards him.

"Thank you, my dear, for rescuing me," he said. "I've been passing through a most painful experience. Lady Di's learning to knit a stocking. It's got a green leg with a tartan top to it. She's been making me read out the directions. 'Cast on six stitches, knit them all together. Drop seven. Keep on dropping seven. Get up from your chair and turn round three times and sit down again. Slip five and throw up six. If the pattern doesn't come out right, keep on throwing up.' Ugh! I feel so sick."

Angela laughed and glanced across the room.

"Lady Di always likes to learn the industries of the country," she said. "I wonder what poor man she'll give the stocking to."

Her glance went from Lady Di and her knitting to a small group who were sitting beyond—Mrs. Devereux and her host and another man. Mrs. Devereux was eating grapes and trying to light her cigarette from a half-smoked one which Mr. Potter was holding out to her. There was a fatuous smile on Monty Potter's coarse red face.

Angela's chin tilted scornfully.

"Lady Di's eccentricities are funny and harmless. Whatever she does, you would never mistake her for anything but a lady," she said.

"The daughter of a thousand earls,'" quoted Beauty.

"Flossie, listen to my brilliant idea," continued Angela, and she proceeded to propound her brilliant idea.

"Tableaux! My dear, they're so exhausting for the stage-manager, and I suppose you'd expect me to be that! And where are the clothes to come from?"

"I should love to wear a dress like that!" said Angela, with her eyes on the picture. "And the way her hair is done is so pretty. Isn't the blue ribbon fascinating, Flossie? Antoinette could copy it exactly."

Jock was standing near, talking to a fine-looking old man in a kilt, who was one of the party that had come over for the grouse-drive that day. Flossie rose from his chair and, without saying what he was going to do, went up to Jock, and a few seconds later was seen bringing him back with him.

He politely offered Jock a chair and re-seated himself.

"We wish to consult you on a matter of importance," he said. "Miss Tempest wants to get up tableaux, and she would like to know"—Flossie bowed towards the portrait on the wall—"how she can represent herself in imitation of that extremely beautiful lady, who, I conclude, is an ancestress of yours."

"Flossie!" expostulated Angela.

"Well, my dear, isn't that what you wish to do?"

Flossie again addressed Jock.

"It would be well to let her have her way. She is dangerous when she's thwarted. I call her request rather swagger, you know. She fancies she's like the picture."

Jock looked at Angela, and then at the portrait, and thought of the blue ribbon she had worn in her hair the night before.

"I think it is like you," he said shyly. "Would you care to put on the dress, and—and see—for yourself?"

"How could I?" exclaimed Angela, flushing vividly.

"I think I could find the dress," said Jock. "There's a locked-up room at the top of the house. I'm almost sure it's in there. If you like, I'll get the key and look." He hesitated. "Mrs. Potter wouldn't mind, would she? She knows that I have the key."

"Dolly! Oh no, Dolly wouldn't mind," answered Angela quickly. "But you! May I really see the dress? I should love to, even if I did not wear it. Perhaps you would not like to see a stranger dressed up in your great—how many greats is she?—grandmother's clothes."

"I would like to see you wearing the dress," said Jock simply, and with obvious sincerity. He looked at Flossie. "If you want to get up tableaux, there are a lot of funny old-fashioned things up there, and you are quite welcome to use them, if you like. I don't know much about them," he added. "Perhaps the moths have made away with them."

Angela was all eagerness and expectancy.

"If you really don't mind letting us have the things to play with," she said persuasively. "When may we go and see them?"

"I will get the key now," said Jock, rising.

"Flossie, we won't tell about the tableaux," said Angela, as she watched Jock leave the hall. "I mean, we need only tell the ones we want to act. You go round and pick your company; then we can slip out and go and choose the clothes quietly."

"Quietly!" echoed Flossie. "They'll all be scrambling for the best bits like Jews at an auction. Who shall we have?" He lit a cigarette and took stock of the room. "You and I and Beauty, to begin with. Then, let me see—not Dolly; we'll get up our enter-

tainment as a surprise for her. Lady Di. No! I can't undertake to place her, and she's so interfering: she must knit, and look on. Those two Fuzzy-Buzzy girls, and old Leach. We might put them on as twin Cupids and a Satyr! Mrs. Devereux." He glanced at the grape-dish. "Good for a Bacchante."

Angela frowned. Her lips tightened—an ominous sign of rebellion.

"If she comes, I won't play," she said.

"All right," said Flossie shortly. He rose. "I'll pick out the ones we want and get them smuggled through the hall, and we'll waylay Bawbee Jock as he comes back."

Jock found the key that he wanted hanging in a cupboard in the smoking-room. As the Potters only occupied Glenmoira for a few weeks at the beginning of the shooting-season, he frequently had reason to go into the house, and knew where to find what he required.

The fine-looking old Highlander, whom he had been talking to in the hall when Flossie had interrupted him, was sitting by the fire in the smoking-room. He was the only occupant of the room, and had collected the day's newspapers round him and was filling his pipe. He watched Jock to see what he was doing.

"Found what you wanted, my boy?" he said, as Jock locked the cupboard door and came over to the fire-place.

Jock held up the key.

"Yes, I wanted this."

Colonel Grant put on his spectacles and looked over the top of them.

"Who's the girl?" he asked, and there was a twinkle in the kindly old eyes.

"What girl?" answered Jock, reddening.

The old soldier flicked his newspaper across Jock's legs.

"What girl? There's only one girl! You know that as well as I do." And Jock went out of the room with his cheeks tingling.

In the corridor outside he found a footman laying the contents of the post-bag, which arrived late in the afternoon at Glenmoira, on a long table by the window. His eye caught his own name on an envelope, and he took up the letter. It was a letter which had been redirected to him from his home address, and as he recognised the handwriting his face clouded over.

At that moment the door into the hall opened, and Angela and Flossie and a little crowd of followers flocked out into the corridor. He crushed the letter into his pocket and came forward to meet them.

"Well," said Angela, "have you found the key?"

"Yes," he said; "here it is!"

Up the narrow stone staircase they trooped, one by one. Up—up, and still up. The house was an old, many-storied building, with little turrety towers and gables, and the labyrinth of passages to be traversed seemed endless.

"Here we are at last; I'm afraid it's been rather a climb," said Jock apologetically, as he stopped before a low door and fitted the key into the lock.

The door opened inwards with a stiff grating sound, and he looked back at Angela over his shoulder.

"Take care of the cobwebs," he said. "The place is very dusty. I hope you won't mind it being in such a mess."

Angela laughed.

"We want dust and cobwebs; that's part of the romance of old clothes."

She peeped round his arm, and was the first to enter through the narrow doorway; but the rest of the party followed quickly on her heels, pushing and jostling each other.

For the next half-hour wild pandemonium reigned in that dusty, musty-fusty, mouse-smelling old attic. The treasures contained in its cupboards and boxes would have driven a collector of antique wardrobes wild with envy.

"Don't you hate to see them tearing at the things like a pack of hungry hounds?" said Angela indignantly to the owner of all this wealth.

She was not taking part in the scramble, and neither was Jock. They were sitting together on a little old brown box at the end of the room and looking on.

Jock shook his head.

"I don't mind," he said. "Why should they not get some fun out of them? They're doing no good lying here." He touched the brown box they were sitting on. "I would not have allowed them to pull this about. This—is yours." His voice lingered on the last words; and he added in a lower key, "As long as we sit on it together, like this, they won't see it, will they?"

A dimple showed at the corner of Angela's mouth. She had been curiously touched by his treatment of that little old brown box. He had spirited it away from the others with a secretive cunning for which she would hardly have given him credit; and depositing it in a dark corner, had asked her if she would sit on it, saying in a whisper, which gave the action a delightful feeling of conspiracy:

"The dress you want is in here. Do you mind very

much not opening the box just now? I—I've always had a kind of feeling about that portrait, since I was quite a little chap. I used to stand in front of it, and look at it, and wonder if I wished hard enough whether she would step out of her frame and come down."

"What a pretty idea!" said Angela, and her eyes shone softly. "No, I won't say anything about the box. They would all want to know what was inside, and you would not like to see the things you loved pulled about, would you?"

"I'll carry it downstairs for you, and give it to one of the servants to put in your room, and then you can do what you like with it," answered Jock.

"What a rash thing to say!" laughed Angela. "I might run away with it!"

"You may do just what you like with it," he repeated; and she saw a look come into his eyes before which her own fell, and neither of them spoke for a few minutes.

Little screams and gurgles and gasps, broken by shouts of laughter from the men at the other end of the room, made them both look up.

"What are they doing?" said Angela. "Flossie is trying to put something on over his head, and Captain de Burgh is trying to pull it off. It's a regular tug-of-war."

To her surprise she saw Jock double himself up as though suddenly seized with a fit of internal agony. The next minute he was rocking himself backwards and forwards in a paroxysm of convulsive laughter. She had never seen any one in such a state of painful mirth before.

"What is it?" she asked anxiously. "You will make yourself ill. I'm sure it hurts."

"Oh! don't you see?" gasped Jock hysterically; the

tears were running down his cheeks. "He's got hold of a kilt, and he's trying to put it on upside-down. I didn't think such a thing was possible. Oh——!" He was seized with a fresh paroxysm of agony.

"It's all right," said Angela. "Look! it has turned inside-out again. Oh dear! what is he going to do now? He's quite mad. He is taken like that sometimes."

With wonderful agility, considering his figure, Flossie had sprung on to the top of an old wooden table which stood near, and was executing a flourish of *pas seuls* and *pirouettes* which would have won him a round of encores on the boards of a variety theatre.

"Hands off!—hands off! Don't come tiddly-winkin' round me," he cried, as the two fluffy-headed sisters, whom he called the Fuzzy-Buzzy girls, pressed forward. "I'm the Tully-gorum on his native heath!" and he snapped his fingers in the air. "Hi huroosh! Macgilly-cuddy-reeks, Ballyhooly!" he yelled. And spinning round on the tips of his shooting-boots with a velocity which sent his kilt fanning out round him like a huge cheese-cake, he jumped from the table, blowing kisses to the four corners of the room.

He landed on the bare boards, and sat rubbing the seat of his knickerbockers ruefully.

"Beastly hot things, kilts! And it's the devil of a hard floor," he remarked.

"Quite, quite mad," murmured Angela, down whose cheeks the tears were also running.

"He did it very well," said Jock. "I couldn't have done a thing like that to save my life."

Angela looked at him.

"Why don't you wear a kilt?" she said. "You're a Highlander." She laughed, and mimicked old Donald's

sing-song drawl. "Aren't you—Glenmoira himself whatever?"

Jock flushed a little.

"I always do wear the kilt," he answered.

"What a story! You are dressed just like any of the other men. You have not got one on now."

"No." He hesitated. "I did not come straight from home here. I had been south—on business."

Angela glanced across the room at Flossie and the group who had gathered round him.

"Was it really that? or was it because, as we were all Sassenachs, you thought it was not worth while?"

"Worth while! Oh! I never thought of that. I'm much more at home in my kilt than I am in anything else."

"Then do wear it. Wear it to-night, at dinner. Please, do!" Angela's voice sounded very pretty and persuasive, and she continued quickly: "You will not be peculiar, because that splendid-looking old man that you were talking to in the hall wears a kilt."

"Colonel Grant," said Jock. "He was a friend of my father's," he added, and the doubtful look on his face cleared as though he saw his way out of a difficulty. 'I have not got my own kilt with me," he said. "But —if you really wish it, there's a dress kilt of my father's, which I have worn before, in one of those boxes. I could wear that. Do you really wish it?"

"Of course I do," she answered. "I wish it—very much indeed."

CHAPTER V

THE tableaux ran the course of most such amateur performances, affording more amusement to the actors than to the audience. There were the inevitable long waits between the scenes, and the sticking fast of the curtain at the crucial moment; but as only an hour's time had been given to the stage-manager to organise his company, it was not to be marvelled at that there were difficulties.

"Very badly managed," remarked Lady Di, who had sat in the front row with her tartan stocking, and made audibly uncomplimentary remarks throughout the entertainment. "If I hadn't had my knitting, I should have been bored to death. Were you stage-managing, Flossie? I thought so! You know as much about stage-managing as my grandmother's cat."

"The pertness of the old thing!" exclaimed Flossie to Angela afterwards. "I'll be shot if she'll see sixty again, and she snapped at me like a saucy minx in curl-papers and a pinafore."

"She was offended because you did not ask her to play," said Angela.

"What could I have done with her?" retorted Flossie. "A complexion like brown paper and a nose like a trumpet! And she wouldn't have said 'Thank you' for a comic part."

Jock took no share in the tableaux. He sat as far back as he could, in the shadow of a curtain, and watched for one picture alone. He had to wait a long time; but it came at last, very near the end, and he did not grudge the waiting. The dream of his childhood had come true; the painted canvas had come to life. He had never seen anything so lovely and so altogether desirable and perfect.

He sat with downcast eyes after the curtain had fallen for the last time, for the tableau was beautiful and was recalled again and again. He was trying to bring it all back: to see her through his closed eyelids. He felt a hand on his shoulder, and, looking up, saw his old friend Colonel Grant standing beside him.

"I'd have liked your father to have seen that, Jock, my boy. I think he would have thought she was in her right place, e[illegible]" and the old soldier smiled.

Jock did not answer. He could not quite trust himself to speak. The hand rested on his shoulder for a moment, and there was a suspicion of moisture in the colonel's eyes as he passed on.

"Poor laddie!" he murmured to himself, "he's taking it badly. She's as pretty as a summer's morning and Highland blood's hot."

. . . . . .

"And you really were pleased? and you think that I looked like the picture? It was very good of you to lend me the dress."

They were standing in the hall together, Jock and Angela; and the candlesticks were being handed round. Angela still wore the dress she had acted in. She knew that she looked lovely in it, and she wished to look lovely.

"And my hair?" She put up her hand and touched

a little curl above her forehead: "I would not let—— It took ages to do. It looks as if it might be easy, but it isn't. And do you know, I found a bit of blue ribbon exactly the same colour as the ribbon in the picture. Do you see?"

"You wore it last night," said Jock.

"Did I?" she asked innocently. But she was glad that he had remembered. "And you! You look splendid!" Her eyes sparkled. "Do you know, I hardly recognised you when I saw you first. Is that a very rude thing to say?"

She did not tell him that from a bend in the staircase, as she was coming downstairs, she had seen him, herself unseen. Could this radiant figure be the shy, diffident young man of the evening before? she had asked herself. And she had watched him pass up the long, stone-vaulted corridor, and she had drawn back and the colour had risen to her cheeks.

Many a time had the old chief of Glenmoira passed up that same corridor, in that same dress; and that night his son looked no unworthy successor to the old name and the old chieftainship. He walked with easy grace, carrying himself with an innate pride of bearing, the heavy pleats of his kilt swinging lightly in time to his step. And Angela had watched him until he had passed out of sight through the folding-doors into the drawing-room beyond; and then she had walked downstairs with her head held proudly, and she knew what had brought the blood flushing warmly to her cheeks.

They were standing close underneath the picture, and she looked up at the painted canvas.

"Your beautiful lady wears a rope of pearls," she said. She touched her bare neck and shook her head sadly. "But I have no pearls—only my own neck."

"I wish I could have given you the pearls," murmured poor Jock, but so low that she did not hear.

"And she wears a rose," continued Angela, intent on the picture. "I had no rose, so I wore a sprig of my r-roid—look!—tucked in here. It is dreadfully squashed, but it smells all the sweeter for that!"

Jock felt as if his heart would burst with pride. He could not trust himself to say a single word.

She turned away from the picture and, stepping back a little, surveyed him critically.

"Yes, you do look fine!" and she walked round him. "Now tell me what all these beautiful things mean," she said. "I know they must have funny names, and I shall try to pronounce them after you."

And so he had to tell her about all the different characteristics of his dress—which he did rather shyly; and at her command he showed her their different uses. His sporran and his dirk, and the skean-dhu sticking out of the folded-down top of his stocking, interested her enormously. Even his buckled shoes did not escape her notice; and the great cairngorm brooch which caught up the folds of his plaid on his shoulder was so beautiful, she declared, that she must stand on her tip-toes to look at it.

"I am glad you are pleased," said Jock, reddening at her enthusiasm. "Of course this is a full-dress kilt to wear on big occasions." He laughed. "I don't get myself up like this when I'm working on my farm."

"Where is your farm?" she asked.

"Over the hill in the next glen. A good few miles from here."

"And you live there? And you really work?"

"Rather! I work very hard," he answered. The interest in her voice was so sweet. It encouraged him to

go on. "I am my own agent for the place, you see, and that gives me a lot to do. I live in a little house over at the clachan on the loch side. We don't have big farms up in the North here as in the Lowlands. It's quite a small bit; my father used to keep it up as the home farm."

"What is a c-clacken?" asked Angela. "Oh dear! I know I did not pronounce that right. You make it sound much softer."

Jock had no fault to find with the sweet voice.

"A clachan is a small village," he said. "You would call it a hamlet probably in England."

"Clack-chan." Angela nodded. "I managed it better that time. Tell me some more about your clachan? What else is there besides the village and your house?"

"There's a church. You would think it a bare kind of place. It's a Presbyterian church. In many of our Highland glens the people are Roman Catholics, but we are not up here. And there's a very dear old minister, who lives in his manse close by the church; and then there's the loch, and the Burying Island out in the middle of it."

Angela drew a little nearer.

"The Burying Island?" she repeated in an awestruck voice. "What do you do with a Burying Island?"

"Bury people on it," said Jock. "We are a superstitious race, we Highlanders. Our people think that to be surrounded by water wards off the evil spirits. They bring their dead for miles from the outlying glens to bury them on the island; and wherever they rest the coffin on the way, they build a cairn of stones. You will see these cairns dotted all over the country-side."

"What a great many interesting things I am learning!"

said Angela. "Only think of all that has been crammed into this one day! Learning to be a loader, and how to shoot grouse, and how to pronounce clacken—I mean clachan!—and—I think the Highlands are adorable. What shall we do to-morrow?"

"I'm going away to-morrow," said Jock; and his tone sounded rather flat.

"Going away? Oh, I'm so sorry!" She did not attempt to keep the frank regret out of her voice. Angela never posed or pretended. Perhaps that was what made her so dangerous.

"Yes, I have to——"

"Now, then, Angela, what are you doing?" interrupted Flossie, bustling up to the table with a candlestick in his hand. "Still admiring yourself, I suppose, and thinking you look like that!" He flourished his candlestick towards the picture on the wall and then held it out to her. "It's time to go to bed," he said.

"It's not time to go to bed," answered Angela. "Every one has gone to the billiard-room. I heard Dolly say they were going to play pool, and I don't wish to play pool. I'm learning Gaelic—the meanings of things. I want to stay here, and learn the meanings of some more things."

"Oh indeed!" Flossie cocked his head on one side like a pensive parrot and raised his eyebrows. Then he began to sing softly, in a sweet falsetto voice:

> "Little birdie on the tree,
> Twittering to the baw-ing bee."

I mean bumbling bee—I mean——"

"Where did you get that from?" said Angela, eyeing him suspiciously. "I never heard you singing it before."

"I composed it in my bath this morning," answered Flossie modestly—"all by myself! My most burning inspirations always do come to me then—if the water is hot enough. I could have gone on composing more, only I remembered I didn't like cold porridge."

Angela laughed.

"You can go away and compose some more now, because I am going to stay here and learn Gaelic. Every one is doing what they like, so why should not I? It's not bedtime. The only one who has gone to bed respectably is Lady Di."

Flossie blew down the funnel of the lamp, and put it out.

"If you're going to say things like that, the less light there is the better," he remarked. He put the candlestick into her hand. "I shall give you just as long as I think right. Not a second more!"

He shook his finger at her, and disappeared.

Angela looked at Jock across the flicker of the candle-flame; her eyes were dancing.

"What shall we play at?" she half-whispered. "Ghosts? It's all so dark and shadowy and mysterious. I know! We will go round and talk to all the pictures; and you will tell me who they are, and what they did, and whether they were nice or nasty, and who they loved and who they hated, and—and everything."

She gave him the candlestick.

"You must carry it, because you are so tall and I am so little. And you must hold it well above your head, so that I can see the expressions on their faces when we are talking about them."

Jock did as he was told. Was there anything he would not have done at her bidding?

"We will begin with this fierce-looking man in the

kilt," said Angela. "I am so glad he can't jump out of his frame. I don't like that daggery thing he is flourishing above his head. He looks as if he were shouting out something."

"That 'daggery thing' is his dirk," explained Jock, "and he is shouting. It's the slogan—his battle-cry. He was a great warrior; he fought at Langside for Queen Mary."

"What did you call it?" asked Angela. "Slo—what?"

"Slogan. It means a battle-cry. Every clan has its own battle-cry. It served as a watchword in cases of sudden alarm, or in the confusion of battle, or in the darkness of the night. The clansmen knew, when they heard it, where to rally round their chief. That and the clan badge were bound to distinguish them in a fight."

"The clan badge!" echoed Angela. "What is that? Oh dear! what a lot of funny things you Highlanders have."

Jock drew his dirk, and showed her, engraved on the silver band which encircled the jewelled hilt, a finely traced wreath of holly.

"That is our badge," he said—"the holly. The clansmen wore the badge of their clan in their bonnets. It marked them out as belonging to their own particular clan. We wear the badge of other things as well."

"I know!" exclaimed Angela. She raised herself again on her tiptoes. "Yes, it's round your brooch too! Such a dear little wreath! Wasn't it clever of me to notice that?"

She regained her balance hurriedly, for the candle had flashed its light on Jock's face, and its expression betrayed him more than he knew.

"We will go on to the other pictures now," she said.

They made the tour of the hall, side by side; and so long as Jock looked at the pictures, he managed to keep his head fairly steady; but when he looked at Angela, his story grew sadly confused and tangled. Then she took up the tale, and weaved into it all manner of quaint conceits and pretty fancies, at which they both laughed and sighed, for she possessed a wonderful power of drawing out the pathos as well as the humour and romance from whatever appealed to her ready tongue and brain.

"Now, we have finished them all," she said. "And I think they ought to be very pleased to have been taken so much notice of. It must be so dull always having to look on and say nothing."

She caught up the train of her long satin gown and, spreading it out, swept curtsies to right and left of her, to each of the four walls in turn.

"There! all you painted ladies and gentlemen," she said. "I am one of you to-night. Don't you recognise my frock? I hope you are pleased with all the nice things I have said about you." She went up to the beautiful reflection of herself and dropped it the lowest curtsy of all. "That is to appease her," she said to Jock over her shoulder. "I don't expect she likes to see me masquerading in her best gown. Perhaps it makes her feel what Flossie would call rather catty! I know it would me. I should long to cry out, 'You little impostor! How dare you peacock about in my clothes!'"

"It looks so pretty to see you making these curtsies," said Jock. "The reflection of your dress shines on the polish of the floor. And your feet! They kind of twinkle."

Angela looked down at her little satin-shod feet which were peeping like white mice from under the rich folds of her skirt.

"We ought to dance a minuet or something old-fashioned, oughtn't we?" she said. "You are dressed so beautifully. And so am I. Shall we?—just by ourselves, with no one looking on to criticise?"

"I'm afraid I can't dance anything but a reel, or"—Jock hesitated—"the sword-dance. But that's only for one person."

"The sword-dance? What is that?" asked Angela.

"You lay two swords, crossing each other, on the floor. And you dance in between the blades, and you must not touch them with your feet."

"That sounds quite impossible," she exclaimed. "You would be sure to trip over them."

Jock squared his shoulders.

"I should be very much annoyed with myself if I did, if you were looking on," he answered. "My father taught me my steps when I was a little chap and reached no higher than his dirk; and I got what-for if I did not please him. He used to stand there, on that deerskin rug by the fireplace, and my mother sat in that big carved chair, with Alister, my—my younger brother, on her knee; and old Roderick, our piper, walked up and down at the end of the room playing the pipes, and I had to stand up and dance my steps."

Angela came close up to him. She put her hands behind her back, and said persuasively:

"Will you dance it—the sword-dance, I mean, for—me?—now?"

Jock flushed and looked at her doubtfully.

"We haven't got the pipes," he said. "It is nothing without that—except—I might whistle the tune."

"Oh do—please, do!" pleaded Angela. "And do begin at once, in case Flossie or some of the others come back—and that would spoil it all."

Jock drew himself up. He offered her his hand, and with a gallantry which sat well on him led her to the big carved chair.

"You shall sit there, and look on," he said.

He fetched a footstool for her feet to rest on, for the chair was high, and they did not nearly reach the ground; and he placed the candle on a stand where it would throw its circle of light on the dark shining boards.

"I feel so funny sitting perched up here," said Angela —"like the King opening Parliament."

"Like a Queen," said Jock, bowing to her.

He stood uncertainly for a few moments, looking round him; and then, with his light step, flitted away into the shadows. Angela felt a thrill of expectancy tingling through her veins. Her hands clung tightly to the arms of the big carved chair, and she waited eagerly to see what he would do. The old hall, with its painted beauties and grim warriors looking down from their frames, the red glow from the peat-fire smouldering on the hearth, the candle-light shimmering along the dark surface of the time-worn boards, made a fitting background for the scene. She drew in her breath with a sharp catch as she saw Jock flit out again from the shadows.

Taking down from the wall, where they hung among the old Highland targets and the Lochaber axes, the two claymores over which he had so often been taught to dance as a boy, he placed them with their blades lightly crossing on the polished floor.

Standing gracefully, a little clear of the basket-hilt of one of the swords, he was, in a moment, dancing lightly

round, outside them, with his arms held well out, the hands a little above the level of the shoulders, but swinging easily with every movement of his body, and the body and feet keeping exact time to the rhythm of the "Kellie Callum," which he half whistled and half blew, as he—or so it seemed in the dim light of the old hall—almost floated round the swords, so quietly and gracefully did he move.

Coming back to the head of the sword from which he had started, with one quick, light spring he was right in across the swords; and then, to any one who knew, the real difficulty of the dance had begun.

Dancing almost on the points of his toes, he moved with wonderful lightness from one square to another over the swords, crossing first the blades and then the hilts with such quickness that it seemed almost impossible that the old Andrea Ferraras, or the basket-hilts in which they were fixed, could escape being touched or moved.

But his balance was perfect; and it was clear from the way in which every part of him kept time to his half-whistled tune that he was a true Highlander and a born dancer.

He only changed his step twice. Dancing lightly backwards with the pretty "Cover the Buckle" step, he finished beside Angela's chair. He was breathing a little quickly. Angela was very pale, and she did not speak, and he was afraid that he had not pleased her.

"I've grown rather stiff," he said apologetically; "I'm out of practice. I have not danced it for so long."

She still did not speak, but held out her hand. The colour rushed up to his brow, and he took it, and held it in his, and looked at it, and then looked at her.

"What am I to do with it?" he stammered unsteadily.

She laughed, a little low laugh—a laugh that lit her eyes softly and rippled round her lips.

"What happens when a man receives an honour from his Royal Master?" She raised her eyebrows interrogatively. "They say 'He kissed hands on his new appointment.' Kneel down!" she said, with a pretty gesture of impe.iousness.

Jock knelt down before her. She touched him lightly on the shoulder just where the big cairngorm brooch caught up the folds of his tartan plaid.

"I appoint you to be my—what shall I say? My most honourable Sword Dancer. Now—you may kiss my hand, and then—— Oh, please go and pick up the swords and bring them here for me to look at!" she concluded hurriedly.

Jock rose. He felt rather queer and dizzy about his head; but he brought her the two old claymores, and he answered all her questions about them, and then he laid them at her feet and sat down beside them on the deerskin rug in front of the fire and stared into the glowing heart of the peat-sods; and neither of them spoke—he, because he could not. This new and wondrous passion of love was flooding his soul, sweeping away all the old landmarks. He had been only a big, honest, simple-minded boy at heart before, clean and sound to the core, a child of Nature's teaching and one of God's gentlemen. Love was revealing him to himself, teaching him the mystery of his own manhood. He could not have expressed his emotion in words if he had tried. There was no language big enough for it.

And as he stared into the fire, other emotions struggled within him. Something was gripping at his throat, with a catch of bitter pain.

The irony of fate! This was his home—the old

heritage which had been handed down to him from generation to generation. Many a scene of feudal pomp had that old hall witnessed. It had echoed to the voices of fair women and gallant men, to the sound of arms and the clash of steel. It was his, and he was as a stranger within its walls; and yet, for one brief space of time that night, he had grasped a fleeting shadow of the old life and been given a heavenly vision of the might-have-been.

He groaned in spirit. If only he were free—free to claim his home and his rank and [illegible] e, and to lay them, as he had laid [illegible] claymores, at her feet!

And she? She did not speak; but she knew that that night she had crossed the [illegible] ed into the enchanted land. Old doubts and fears had melted away, as night-mists melt before the breath of dawn; and her face was set to meet the dawn, and she was not afraid. For all her youth, she was wise in the ways of the world, for she knew the world she belonged to. Her girlish eyes had looked through the portals of the gates of the garden of pleasure; and her heart had sometimes stood still with a nameless fear when she had thought of how her feet were to tread its flowery paths.

She watched his face, with the peat-glow reflected in his eyes, and she guessed his thoughts—for they were very transparent. She knew that he loved her; and she knew that she had found her mate. It did not make her feel abashed or ashamed to think that he had not told her in words that he loved her. For some reason he could not, and she felt for him something of the yearning pity and compassion of a mother who sees her child perplexed and puzzled and bewildered

and cannot hold out a helping hand. It was the divine instinct of motherhood, which lies at the root of love in every true woman's heart.

So they sat in the firelight, and did not speak—she because, being a woman, she could not; and he, because the great love which he dared not utter seemed to be tearing the heart out of his bosom.

Sounds from the billiard-room echoed in the distance—the opening and shutting of doors, the shrill sound of women's voices and the deeper tones of men's, reached their ears.

Angela raised her head.

"Oh dear!" she murmured. "That means that they are all coming back."

"Yes—they are coming back," Jock repeated after her in a dull, lifeless tone.

"In two minutes Flossie will run in and tell us that the time is up," sighed Angela. "It would be fun to blow out the candle and hide; and then he would go fussing round, calling out, 'Angela! Angela! you naughty puss! Come out at once!' That is what he used to say when I was a tiny tot, and rolled myself up in the nursery curtains when he came to play with me."

Jock had risen to his feet and stood looking down at her, as she sat in the big chair. Her satin gown fell in soft white folds about her little feet as they rested on the high stool, and the candle-light caught the sheen of the blue ribbon in her hair, and he could smell the sweet, aromatic scent of the faded bunch of maid.

"Is—is that your name? Angela?" he said huskily. His lips trembled over the word.

"Yes," she answered softly. "Do you think it is pretty? It is not at all appropriate, because I am not

an angel at all. Flossie would tell you that. Oh, there he comes! Don't you hear him blowing his nose like a motor-horn?"

"And—this is good-bye?" stammered Jock.

Angela's eyes fell. She studied the points of her shoes and murmured:

"Is the clack—clachan, I mean—too far away for you to—come back and—pay calls? Oh dear! there's the motor-horn again. Flossie will give himself a dreadful headache if he blows so hard." She pushed aside the footstool, but her feet could not touch the floor. "Please help me," she said. And he took the hand she gave him, and helped her down from the big chair. "Thank you." She shook out her satin skirts, and dropped him a curtsy, prettier than any she had given to the painted ladies and grim warriors; and the dimple at the corner of her mouth looked very dangerous. There was a mischievous challenge in her eyes as they flashed up at him. "You know, it would really be quite the proper thing for you to come and call, because"—she smiled at her lovely counterpart on the wall—"because I am your great-great-grandmother!"

Angela sat for a long time in front of her dressing-table that night before she went to bed, and talked to herself in the glass. She did not scold; there was a misty look in her eyes, almost as though they shone through tears; and a quivering smile hovered round her lips which made the words they uttered sound sweet and tender even to her own ears.

"He is just like a lost child. His dear, big, honest heart was bursting, and he could not speak because there is a reason. I am going to find out that reason. I must—I really must, for his own sake."

CHAPTER VI

JOCK left soon after breakfast the following morning, and he said good-bye to Angela before a great many people, and very few words passed between them.

"How are you going to journey to your—clachan?" she had asked gaily. "With your knapsack in your hand, and your gun over your shoulder?"

"My things will go with the post-gig," Jock had answered. "I have some business to do up one of the other glens, and I shall walk back over the hill."

Angela found the morning pass quickly, because she was never dull or allowed herself to be bored, wherever she was. After lunch she explored the old-fashioned walled garden, and made friends with the gardener. He was very Highland, and spoke English with the same sing-song drawl as old Donald. He told her, among other things, that he had never been out of Glenmoira all his life, and that he was sure that there was no place like it in the world.

He was very polite, but it was evident that he did not like the Sassenach rule at Glenmoira. Angela humbly owned that she was a Sassenach herself, and he looked at her doubtfully; but he was a true Celt, and beauty appealed to him. He presented her with a bouquet, which she accepted with one of her radiant smiles, and his heart passed for ever into her keeping.

She found a bench at the top of the garden, where she sat down and was enjoying herself to her own satisfaction, when her reveries were broken in upon by the unexpected appearance of Captain de Burgh.

The Beauty arrived at a most unfortunate moment for himself. She was looking so very pretty. There was a sweet, happy, tender light in her eyes; and he was not to know what had brought it there. He lost his head, and rushing blindly on his fate, the inevitable happened.

Angela was very sorry. She had been feeling so happy that she had forgotten about him altogether. If she had been on her guard, she might have avoided the crisis. She was very sorry—kindly, gently sorry; but she had to give him his dismissal.

The Beauty took his beating badly. He used every argument of pleading, reproach, love, and indignation, to try to shake her resolve.

"Then I shall go away," he said at last. "I can't stay here. I shall leave to-night."

It was no use for Angela to remonstrate, or to assert that it would be so much pleasanter to shake hands and be friends, and take up life on a different basis; he continued to make the same answer—that he could not stay at Glenmoira. He would go away—that night—the sooner the better, he reiterated.

Angela felt very uncomfortable, as though she were the culprit and ought to go away herself. The Beauty took a gloomy satisfaction in making her feel that she had treated him badly, and she resented it. It was very petty of him to put her in the wrong, and it was not fair, because she had not encouraged him to believe that she cared for him.

He rose at length, and, looking very handsome and

sulky and injured, held out his hand and said good-bye, leaving her seated on the old garden-bench.

She did not believe that he meant to leave Glenmoira, or that his good-bye meant anything more serious than holding himself aloof for the next few days and scowling at her from a distance. She watched him walk down the garden-path in the direction of the house, and something in the way he carried himself roused in her a little spirit of devilry.

"I'm not one bit sorry for him," she murmured, and her eyes sparkled maliciously.

The Beauty had wooed and won, and ridden away so often, leaving broken hearts behind him. Perhaps the cards of destiny were only dealing out to him measure for measure, according to his deserts.

She leant back against the garden-bench. A row of beehives ran down by the side of a wall near by, and the hum of the busy little workers was borne over to where she was sitting. It was a peaceful, drowsy sound, soothing to listen to.

"But you are not really soothing at all," she said severely to a heavy-laden bee as it droned past her. She bent forward to watch the humming throng. "Fussy, restless little things! So selfish and self-absorbed and greedy, hoarding up your store of honeyed bawbees, whilst your master, your poor chief, has no bawbees to store!"

She smiled at the conceit of her own thought, and then, looking at her watch, rose hastily. It was past four o'clock. After the unpleasant scene she had just passed through with Beauty de Burgh she did not wish to go back to the house and meet him, and if she remained where she was, some officiously disposed person might come and find her, to bring her in to tea.

The thought hurried her away in the opposite direction from the house.

She found a gate which took her out of the garden, and walking on for a little way, struck into a path which led up to the turf wall skirting the edge of the moor She found the exact spot where she had sat with Jock the day before, and where he had told her that there was a reason and asked her not to misunderstand.

She picked a bunch of roid from the same clump of green that he had picked it from, and, fastening it into her coat, continued her walk. A Highland moor is alluring, even when there is no one to tell you the meaning underlying every patch of heather or crotal-stained boulder, and she wandered on, paying little attention to how the time was flying or to where her steps were leading her.

"I believe I have lost my way," she said to herself at last, stopping and looking round. "I have not seen the vestige of a path for ages."

She had strayed off the moor and was standing on a ridge looking down into a wild, rocky glen. A little stream ran noisily at the foot of it; in the distance she saw a thin column of blue smoke rising into the still air.

She went a short way down the steep bank, and then hesitated. Should she go on, or turn back? She glanced over her shoulder and gave a quick, frightened gasp. A shaggy head with great horns, and tangled tawny hair hanging round it, and a pair of eyes, stared at her from over the top of a rock not six paces away.

With a scream of terror she turned and fled down the hillside, through the bracken and heather towards the blue column of smoke.

The little Highland cow was quite harmless, and did not attempt to follow her; but as she never stopped to look back, she did not know that it was merely watching her with bovine placidity, and she fled on. The ground was treacherous, the heather dragged at her skirt and the bracken twisted round her ankles, but terror lent wings to her feet. She had come in sight of the cottage from which the smoke was rising, and was hurrying still faster with the hope of safety near, when she stumbled and fell. She tried to recover herself, but slipped, and rolling over and over, landed finally on her back in a deep hollow. There she lay, with such an excruciating pain stinging through her foot that it made her sick and faint, and she knew that she would have no strength to call out or save herself when that terrible head made its appearance again.

How long she lay there she could not tell; the hollow was deep, and she could see nothing beyond it. Then she felt her heart stand still with fright, and a clammy, cold chill crept through her limbs, for there was the sound of heavy breathing close beside her. She shut her eyes and turned her head aside. If she was to be devoured, she would not look. The sound of breathing drew nearer. It was close above her—a kind of deep panting; and then something cold and soft and slimy touched her. With one final effort she tried to struggle to her feet, but with a moan of pain she fell back and fainted away.

When she came to herself again, it was to a dreamy, dazed kind of consciousness that she was being carried, and that her cheek lay against something rough which had a peculiar peaty smell of homespun about it, and reminded her of sitting in the shooting-butt with Jock. And then — memory came back with a rush. She

remembered what had happened, and she knew who was carrying her.

She opened her eyes and shut them again quickly. She did not wish Jock to see that she was conscious. He was so intent on picking his steps so as not to shake her, that it would be a pity to distract his attention; and although her foot hurt horribly, she was content to lie still, for she knew that she was safe, and that he would take care of her. The broad shoulder she leant against made a restful pillow for her head, and without quite opening her eyes, she could look at him through her eyelashes. It gave her a different view of him to what she had ever had before. He wore his moustache very short and brushed sharply back, and his mouth was the best feature in his face.

She felt him stumble, ever so slightly, as a loose stone rolled from under his foot, and he looked down at her and she shut her eyes again very tightly. But it was no use. She was betrayed, and she knew that the colour was racing up into her cheeks and that it was quite impossible to keep on pretending any longer that she was in a dead faint. She opened her eyes wide this time.

"Where are you taking me to?" she asked.

The anxious furrow on his brow cleared; a look of relief came into his face; he stopped.

"I am so glad to hear you speak," he said. "What happened? Where are you hurt?"

"It's my foot," she murmured. She tried to raise herself, and a stab of pain, like a burning knife being driven into her ankle, made her fall back against his shoulder.

"I am so sorry," he said. "I am afraid it is hurting you very badly."

"If I could only get my boot off!" she whispered through her white lips. "It feels like a band of fire."

"Perhaps I can make that better," he said; and kneeling down and still keeping her pillowed against his shoulder, he felt for his knife, and taking her foot in his hand he slit up the lace of her boot and gently drew it off.

"Oh, what a relief!" she murmured faintly.

He slipped the little brown boot into his pocket.

"Do you feel well enough to go on?" he asked. "We will be there in another minute and Sheila will know what to do to make the pain better."

"Where is 'there'? and who is Sheila?" asked Angela. The relief of feeling her foot free from the pressure of the boot was immense, and she began to revive.

"Sheila is old Donald's wife, and she lives in a cottage quite near," explained Jock.

"That would be the cottage that I saw the smoke coming from," said Angela. "I was trying to reach it. I was running away from a beast with terrible horns when I tripped and fell. I lay for ages expecting to be eaten up; and something came and sniffed round me with a dreadfully cold nose. I was so terrified that I suppose I fainted from fright."

"That was my dog," said Jock. "I might have passed by if it had not been for him. Do you think you can bear being moved again? I will try not to hurt you."

He raised her carefully in his arms and moved on. The little cottage from which the blue smoke was rising was only a few hundred yards away now.

"Sheila!—Sheila!" he called as he drew near; and Angela heard a woman's voice answer.

"I will carry you straight into the kitchen," he said; "I won't jar you, so don't be frightened."

The doorway of the cottage was so low that he had to bend his head to pass under it; but he did not hurt her, and the next minute Angela felt herself gently lowered, and she was deposited in an old-fashioned arm-chair drawn up beside a fireplace where a fire smouldered on the low hearth.

A dark-eyed old woman, who yet did not look old, drew near and curtsied to her respectfully. She wore a black skirt and a blue-and-white checked apron, and a little green tartan shawl was crossed over her bosom. Everything about her was spotlessly neat and fresh and clean; and she wore the sweetest cap imaginable. A white goffered frill encircled it, enclosing her face like the petals of a flower, and it was tied with a tape bow under her chin. Angela afterwards discovered that it was called a mutch.

Jock spoke to her rapidly in Gaelic. He was evidently explaining what was the matter, and Sheila nodded, and appeared quite to understand, for she gave him a bucket, and as he took it, he smiled reassuringly at Angela.

"You're all right now," he said. "Sheila knows what to do. She doctors all of us in the glen here. I'm going to the spring to get some fresh cold water for her to bandage your foot with"; and he went off with the bucket.

Sheila drew another chair alongside of the big one, and laid the poor foot tenderly on a pillow which she fetched from the inner room. The foot was swollen to nearly double its size, and Sheila touched it and looked at Angela.

"It will be the goot stocking that I will have to

cut," she said, holding up a pair of scissors to show what she wanted to do. She spoke like Donald, with the same sweet, sing-song plaint in her voice, Angela noticed.

"Oh yes! cut it off. Do anything. I don't mind."

Sheila very gently cut away the stocking; and then she brought a small wooden tub and poured some stuff into it from a black bottle which gave out a pungent, aromatic smell. When Jock came back with the cold water she took the bucket from him at the door, and then he disappeared and left Sheila to do her doctoring.

The water was deliciously cool and Sheila's fingers were light and tender. There seemed to be something magnetic in their touch.

"Thank you so much," said Angela gratefully, when the last fold of the bandage had been fastened, and Sheila had rearranged the pillow and made a kind of cradle for the wounded foot to lie on.

Sheila smiled.

"Is it petter already?" she asked.

"Oh, much better!" sighed Angela. "How soon will I be able to get on my boot and walk home? Not that I want to hurry away," she added quickly, glancing round the kitchen, where everything was so clean and wore such a delightful air of homely comfort.

Sheila was tidying away the tub and the black bottle and all the signs of her nursing with neat precision. She came back to the armchair and, looking at the bandaged foot, shook her head.

"It is not walking that you will be for many days," she said.

"Many days!" exclaimed Angela. "But I must get back to Glenmoira. I am staying there."

"It is not back at all that you will be getting. The foot is a very bad foot whatever." Sheila spoke gently, but with conviction.

"But I must get back," protested Angela. "I could drive, couldn't I? They would send a carriage for me, I am sure."

"There is never a road where a carriage could drive up the glen; and it is far across the hill to Glenmoira. A man could not carry you whatever; and you cannot ride, because it would not be goot for the foot."

A shadow darkened the window, and the next minute there was a low knock at the door.

Sheila went to open it, and when Angela heard Jock's voice speaking to her, she cried out:

"You may come in. The doctoring is all over, and Sheila has taken nearly all the pain away."

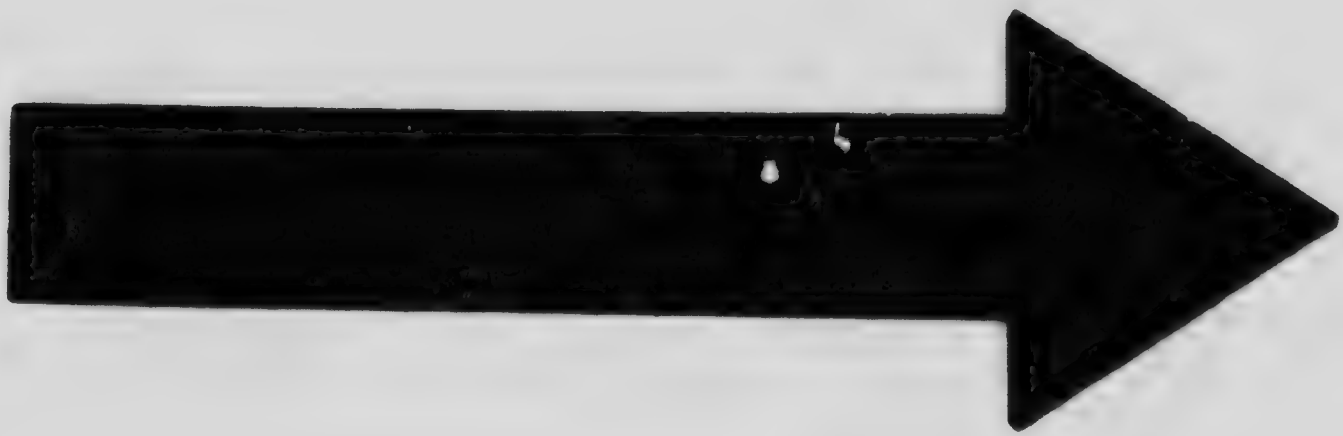
Jock hesitated on the threshold.

"Do come and tell me what I am to do!" pleaded Angela. "Sheila says that I shall not be able to walk for days, and that no carriage can get up the glen, and that I can't ride and—— What am I to do? How am I to get back to Glenmoira?"

Jock came and stood beside her, and listened to all she had to say with that anxious furrow again on his brow. Then he spoke to Sheila in Gaelic.

"I am afraid it is a very bad sprain," he said. "Sheila says you must not put your foot to the ground, or shake it, or jolt it in any way, else it may give you a lot of trouble. And it is true," he added, "there is no road over the hill. And it would be dreadfully rough going for you to try to ride."

Angela looked again round the dear little kitchen and then at Sheila's sweet face framed in its white mutch and then at Jock.



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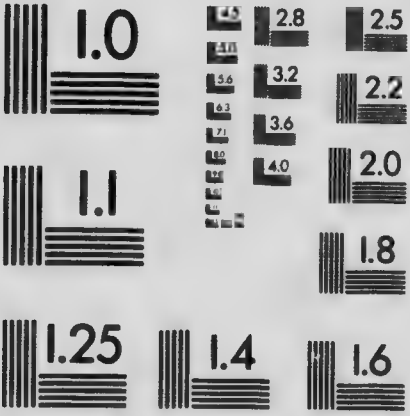

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"What do you wish me to do?—stay here?" she asked. She spoke with a pretty appeal of confidence in his judgment.

"I think—I am afraid you will have to stay here," he said earnestly. "Sheila will take great care of you; I know she can. She is my housekeeper, you know. She and Donald live up here because of his work during the shooting-time; but she keeps house for me all the rest of the year."

Angela laughed.

"What fun it would be!" she exclaimed.

"I would try to find some other way out of the difficulty if I wasn't quite sure that Sheila could make you comfortable," continued Jock, still anxious. "She was a servant with us at Glenmoira before she married Donald. She would know quite well how to look after you."

"I am sure she would," answered Angela quickly. "It is not that I mind for myself. I should love to stay in this sweet little cottage; but it would give so much trouble."

A great relief appeared on Jock's face.

"Sheila won't think anything a trouble," he answered confidently. "She would love to have you—wouldn't you, Sheila?" And the fond look in the woman's eyes, as she answered her young master's question, almost brought the tears to Angela's.

"I can arrange for Donald to put up with one of the other gillies," said Jock, "and then you won't be bothered with any one coming in and out; and—you would like me to go back to Glenmoira and explain, wouldn't you? It would be better than sending word."

"You think of everything," said Angela gratefully. "How much trouble I am giving you! I am so sorry."

"It is no trouble. I——" He paused. "Is there anything you would like them to send over? I could take a note, or a message."

Angela considered.

"If I am to stay here for a few days, I should want some things, shouldn't I? I could write a note to Ant——" She caught herself up. "Whom shall I send it to? Dolly is so vague! I think I will write to Flossie. He would understand. He is like ten great-grandmothers rolled into one. But I haven't got any paper to write with. Oh yes, I have." She took a letter out of her pocket. "There's a half-sheet here."

Jock gave her a pencil; and she scribbled hastily for a few minutes and then folded up her note tightly into a small square and gave it to him. As he put it into his pocket, his hand came in contact with the little brown boot, and he felt horribly guilty and deceitful for not telling her that it was there; but he would not have parted with that little brown boot for anything in the world.

"Perhaps I had better say good-bye and go," he said, "or else they will be getting anxious. May I—come over to-morrow to ask how you are getting on?"

"All these miles across the hills from your clachan," said Angela, opening her eyes wide.

"It is not really far; this is almost half-way to it. And even if it was not, I——" He stopped. "May I come?" he concluded humbly.

Angela lowered her eyes.

"It would be kind of you to come. Perhaps—I might feel rather frightened and lonely here!" And the dimple showed at the corner of her mouth.

"There isn't a creature in the glen that would hurt you," answered Jock, "and I will be just over the hill there."

"Do you think if I called very loud you would hear?"

Then he saw the dimple, and knew that she was playing with her words; and that sudden, swift smile lit up his face.

"I think I would," he said.

They were alone, for Sheila had gone to milk her little Highland cow, which had played such an important part in the day's adventure. There was no one to look on and listen, except the round-faced clock on the wall.

Angela thanked him very prettily for having found her and taken such care of her.

"But you said it was not you who found me," she added, correcting herself. "Where is your dog? It was he, wasn't it?"

Jock went to the door and let in a big deerhound, who had been sitting patiently waiting on the path outside. He said something to the dog, who went up to Angela's chair, and she stroked his head.

"Why did I never see him before?" she said. "He was not with you at Glenmoira."

"No, he was not with me. I found him on the moor this afternoon," said Jock. "They have wonderful instincts, these deerhounds. I believe he knew I was coming home to-day, and he had come to meet me."

"What is his name?" asked Angela.

"Dileas. It means 'Faithful' in Gaelic."

Angela tried to pronounce the name after him.

"You must pronounce the *D* like a *J*," said Jock—"Jeelus."

Angela tried again and succeeded better.

"He looks so wise. It was very clever of him to find me; I suppose he smelt me out," she said.

The dog turned his head and looked up at his master, and Jock patted him.

"I don't know about that. His nose isn't much good to him. These deerhounds run by sight, not scent; but I don't use him for sport. He is my faithful companion—a rare good one. Your name suits you, old boy, doesn't it?" And Jock took the dog's ear and fondled it caressingly. He stooped down and whispered something in Gaelic, and Dileas raised his big grey paw and laid it on Angela's lap and gazed at her mournfully with his tragic eyes.

"Don't look so sad!" she said; and with her quick, pretty impulsiveness she put her arms round Dileas's neck and kissed his nose. "That is for finding me. I am very grateful. Thank you," she said.

Angela slept that night in a tiny room in a box-bed. The sheets smelt of heather and roid and all the sweet clean things which they had lain on when they were bleaching on the hill-side. Through the open window she heard the murmur of the stream, and sometimes the cheep of a sleepy bird roosting in the thatched roof above her head. It was all so strange and quiet and peaceful; so near to Nature, so far away from the fret and clamour of life. And woven into her half-dreaming fancies came back the haunting echo of old Donald's prophetic greeting. She fell asleep, murmuring the words to herself:

"It is to the glens that you have come, and it is in the glens that you will stay; and it is our chief, Glenmoira himself, that will be knowing that it is true."

CHAPTER VII

SHEILA had lit her fire, and cleaned her kitchen, and milked her cow, and finished a variety of other domestic duties before Angela opened her eyes in her new home the following morning.

Sheila had slipped once into the room noiselessly to see if her guest were awake; but she was not, and she had bent over the bed and gazed for some minutes with a dreamy tenderness in her eyes at the lovely child-like face which lay so peacefully on the white pillow.

The sense of prophetic intuition, so inherent in the Highland nature, was more finely developed in Sheila than in Donald. She was a woman of a higher intellectual standard than the old gillie, whom she had married somewhat late in life. The training of her healing gift had given her a power of understanding, of inward perception, which almost amounted to an inspired sense.

That day of Angela's coming, she had known that something was going to happen to her chief. She had been sitting at her cottage door waiting, with a sweet confidence and certainty, knowing that in some way she was to be the means of giving him help; and as she stood looking down at her sleeping charge, she knew that under her humble roof she was sheltering one who was very near to the heart of her beloved master.

She stood for some minutes watching, and then she moved noiselessly about the room, setting it in order against the time when Angela should awake. Sheila knew the ways of gentle-folk; and as she unpacked the bag, which one of the gillies had carried across the hill from Glenmoira the night before, the pretty, dainty trifles she found inside it did not surprise her as they would have done any of the other cotters' wives in the glen.

When Angela did at last awake, she found a cup of tea ready for her, and Sheila helped her to dress, and re-bandaged her foot, and finally settled her in the big armchair beside the open door, for it was a lovely morning. Then she drew up a table and laid the breakfast upon it.

Angela had talked all the time she was being dressed, and had learnt the meanings of a great many more new things.

"I think it would be perfectly heavenly to live in a cottage like this," she said. "Nothing but the hills and the heather and everything that is good and sweet all round about you! I should never tire of it. Oh! what are you pouring into that funny little bowl? It does smell nice!"

"It will be the porridge," said Sheila; and she gave Angela a horn spoon, and placed the bowl on the table beside her.

Angela made a hole in the middle of the porridge with the horn spoon, and Sheila filled it up with cream. Such cream!—thick and yellow, with frothy bubbles on the top.

"It is the most delicious thing I ever tasted," declared Angela. "I am so glad I sprained my ankle."

Sheila smiled her strange, sweet, enigmatical smile,

and said she was very glad; and after putting everything near, so that Angela should not require to move, she disappeared to some back premises of her own to churn the butter, and Angela was left to finish her breakfast alone.

She had only just finished, and was leaning back in the old chair, with a restful feeling of peace, content to sit in the sunshine and dream her own dreams to the music of the larks and the rippling murmur of the water, when she heard a crunching step on the path which led from the cottage down to the banks of the stream below. She flushed warmly, and caught in her breath.

"No," she murmured. "He walks more lightly than that." And she bent to look through the open door.

"Flossie!"

Yes, it was Flossie! A red Connemara cloak was thrown over his shoulder and he carried a basket from which bulged parcels and bundles of all shapes and sizes. His cap was very much on the back of his head and he was very hot.

"Oh, Flossie, Flossie, how funny you look!" cried Angela. "Like little Red Riding Hood coming to bring her grandmother jam and tea and——"

"Red Riding Hood indeed! A nice dance you've led me, miss."

Flossie put down the basket on the doorstep, and taking out his pocket-handkerchief, passed it over his face, which was very pink.

"Poor Flossie!" said Angela. "How sweet of you to come and look for me! You must have got up dreadfully early, and I know you hate that. Come in and sit down, dear Red Riding Hood. There is a nice wooden stool for you to sit on, and you can screw

in your eye-glass the better to see me with. The wolf is not anywhere near, so you are quite safe."

"I'm none so sure." Flossie put his nose gingerly round the corner of the door. "Where's that brawny savage—that red-haired Heelander? Where's Bawbee Jock?"

"He's not a savage, and he has not red hair, and he is not here—of course he is not here. So you may take that guardianly look off your face at once," answered Angela indignantly.

"Well, I'm glad you had the sense to send him away," snapped Flossie. "Really, Angela, if you had not me to look after you, I don't know what would happen. I very nearly came over last night myself, I was so fussed."

"But, dear, I told you so particularly in my note not to!" remonstrated Angela. "I should have been asleep by then, and it would have been so unnecessary. I told you I was quite safe and all right, and—— Where did you get that Red Riding Hood cloak from? Is it for me?"

"Dolly sent it," said Flossie; "I don't know why. I suppose she thought it looked comforting. It was beastly hot to carry."

"How like Dolly!" said Angela. "I hope you haven't brought any food in that basket, because I'm living on the fat of the land. Literally! Look at that cream—what there is left of it. Isn't this a delicious place? I think I was so clever to sprain my ankle and find it. Have you seen Sheila? She exactly fits into the scene and makes it perfect."

"If you mean the lady in a night-cap, whom I surprised turning the handle of a butter-machine round the corner, I suppose I did." Flossie looked about him

critically. "Yes—it's not bad. Quite good of its kind. The sort of thing you'd see at Olympia with a hand up pointing to the 'Model Highland Cottage'; and—you'd find an advertisement for whiskey inside." He deposited the cloak on a chair and drew in the wooden stool and sat down. "How's the foot?" He glanced at Angela suspiciously. "You look all right."

Angela shook her head.

"It's a very bad sprain—a dreadfully bad sprain. Sheila says it will be ages before I can be moved. I did not say too much about it in my note, because I was afraid you would come hurrying over; but it really is bad. Thank you so much for telling Antoinette about my things. I thought it better to write to you. Antoinette gets so ridiculously excited about nothing!"

"It was just as well you did send the note to me," answered Flossie. "I've got a piece of news for you that you may not quite like. Antoinette's bolted!"

"Flossie!" Angela sat up and stared.

"Bolted!" repeated Flossie. "Not with the spoons or the second footman, but—on the ground of morals!"

"Morals! Flossie! And I thought she was so respectable."

"That's just it. She's kicked up the devil of a row because of her respectability. Dolly told me to tell you the story, and I suppose it's true, as she got it from her maid. It's that white-faced fool Hawkins."

"Hawkins!" echoed Angela. "And Antoinette!"

Flossie wagged his head solemnly.

"Yes, Hawkins! It seems there was a grand flare-up at supper last night in the servants' hall. I'll give you the story as I heard it. I suppose you know—I didn't—that in strictly aristocratic establishments it is etiquette for the upper-ten-below-stairs to retire from the servants'

hall in a solemn procession before the pudding course. They leave the common herd and retreat into an inner sanctuary called The Room!—a kind of a Pugs' Parlour, where they all sit round and turn up their noses at each other and worry the most toothsome of the bones that have fallen from the rich man's table."

"But what has that got to do with Antoinette's respectability?" said Angela.

"Don't be in such a hurry. I'm coming to that. Evening dress is *de rigueur* in Pugs' Parlour, and Hawkins fancies himself in a kilt! Can't you see him? Knock-kneed, no insteps, and shoulders like a champagne bottle. Antoinette objected to sitting next him on the grounds that he wore his knees out-of-doors. She could not *manger* her pudding, or whatever succulent morsel she was enjoying at the moment, with such an immodest spectacle so near. If his knees are the same colour as his face, I don't wonder she was put off her feed.

"Last night matters reached a climax. Hawkins had got a little extra whiskey inside him, I suppose, and took to swaggering on the strength of it. Dolly's maid affirms that he wasn't drunk, only a little chatty. Anyhow, he climbed on to the table and—tried to dance a reel. My dear! What are you rolling about like that for? Have you got a pain?"

"Yes," said Angela faintly—"a pain just like what poor Bawbee Jock had when you danced your reel on the box-room table."

"Comparisons are invidious, and the circumstances were quite different," said Flossie. "I had all my own clothes on, and the Lord knows what Hawkins had! Precious little, I expect; for he borrowed his kilt from a genuine Scotchy, and you may bet your boots that the

stingy beggar wouldn't give him a rag more than he could help."

"Oh, Flossie! surely——"

Flossie held up his hand.

"My dear, we won't go into particulars. I've always tried to bring you up nicely; but it's a well-known fact, and the reason is one of personal economy, that you can't take the breeks off a Heelander. It's a national proverb. We will draw a veil over the scene after that. I don't know whether Hawkins was allowed to dance his reel or not."

"And then what happened?" asked Angela. "Don't make me laugh any more, Flossie. It's so exhausting."

"Well, there was a nice row in Pugs' Parlour. The upshot was that Antoinette went and packed her boxes there and then, and departed in a state of virtuous apoplexy. She doesn't intend to come back either. She left an address for you to send her her wages."

"I am very glad she has gone." said Angela.

Flossie looked at her sharply.

"What does that mean? Are you meditating a retirement from the world?" He twisted himself round on his stool. "If you are, you'd better take into consideration the fact that you can't do your own hair. That thing you've got stuck on at the back of your head is more like a *meringue* than anything else."

But Angela did not retort indignantly, as he had expected. She was gazing out through the open door, and there was a dreamy, far-away look in her eyes.

"It is to the glens that you have come, and it is in the glens that you will stay."

The old gillie's words seemed to have taken hold of her imagination with a fateful persistency.

Flossie saw the look; for nothing that Angela did

was ever lost upon him, and something sharp and unexpected struck a pang to his heart as though a knife had been driven into it. It was the feeling that a mother might agonise through when she realises for the first time that a day may come when her darling will be stolen from her; or that of a kind and loving gardener, who has lavished his care on a sweet, rare flower, and when he has trained it to perfection, and it is unfolding its petals to show the beauty of its gratitude, a stranger's hand snatches it away to bloom in another soil.

For this quaint, frivolous, and fraudulently tender-hearted little man loved Angela from the depths of his soul. From the time when she had been given, a helpless child, into his care, he had guarded her with the vigilance of a watch-dog and the tenderness of a mother. And because he had been taken by surprise, and was strangely afraid, he did what a man generally does under such circumstances, he began to scold. He planted his plump hands firmly, one on each knee, and said in a voice which made Angela jump, and hastily remove the tell-tale look of dreaminess from her eyes:

"Angela! Answer me! Is that foot really bad enough to keep you laid up here; or is it because you have taken a fancy to—the place that you're pretending that you can't leave it?"

"Oh no, it is not pretence—really, Flossie, it is not. And I never tell fibs—you know I don't!" protested Angela earnestly. "The pain was simply excruciating at first. I fainted; and if—if Bawbee Jock had not carried me very, very carefully, I would have gone on fainting!"

"Carried you, did he? The beggar!" Flossie fixed her with wrathful eyes. "How far?"

"I don't know," said Angela. "Sometimes it seemed far, and—sometimes it didn't."

"Humph!" grunted Flossie. "How long does that old woman in the night-cap say you will have to stay here?"

"Perhaps a week—perhaps longer." Angela pointed to the swathed heap on the cushion of the chair opposite. "If you only saw my foot, Flossie, you would be more sorry than cross. You can see the outside, anyhow. It's like an old gouty man's."

"How do I know what's underneath those innocent-looking bandages?" Flossie glanced round the kitchen. "And you can't sit in this stuffy little hole for a week. We must get you out." He felt his arms. "I might be able to carry you if——"

"Oh no, you could not," interposed Angela quickly. "I mean—it would not be good for you! I'm heavier than I look." She blushed rosy red, much to her annoyance, and added, stammering confusedly: "B-Bawbee Jock said something about coming over to call—to ask how my foot was; and—and he would carry me. He knows how to do it, you see!"

"The devil he does!" It was the last straw, and Flossie exploded violently. "Now look here, Angela! Please to understand this, that I will not have you living up here alone—for that old woman in the night-cap doesn't count—and allow that fellow to be hanging about, sitting in your pocket all day long. I won't, and that's flat!"

"He's too big to sit in my pocket," murmured Angela.

"Don't be flippant! You know quite well what I mean. Do you think I've moiled and toiled away the best years of my life to keep you unspotted from the

world, to let you get into a mess now? No fear! Where would your reputation be at the end of three days? I wouldn't give a cock's feather for it."

Angela pouted.

"I don't see how any one can say horrid things about me, if they can't see me."

"See you!" Flossie jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction whence he had come. "Do you think that lot over there won't be on the look-out for some nice little tit-bit? They'll be watching you like a set of Peeping Toms—the Devereux woman! and that hoary-headed sinner Leach! And Lady Di coming it over me with the duties of a mother! No! The safe thing to do is to keep you in the public eye. I shall tell Dolly that you mustn't be left alone. She doesn't like being left alone herself, so she'll understand. I'll arrange that there's always something going on. They're to come over to cheer you up. Ministering angels scattering crumbs of kindness! I know them. They'll all be screaming to come. We'll have picnics and tea-parties, and comings and goings. I shall jolly well see that you are not left alone, my dear."

"Oh, Flossie! and I thought I was going to have such a delightful, quiet, peaceful time, away from all the silly conventional things that don't mean anything, and live with the big things that do: the hills and the moors, and the great open sky, and——"

"Bawbee Jock," growled Flossie, like an angry mastiff. "Not if I know it!"

"But you can't keep him away altogether. If I am to be carried out on to the heather, he must carry me!" Angela's mouth tightened and her eyes looked mutinous. "I mean it, Flossie! I won't allow any

one else to carry me except——" and she nodded defiantly at him.

"Well, I'll give in so far," said Flossie grudgingly. "But I'll take care to be on the spot, to see how he does it. He's to be a kind of body-snatcher—nothing more. Great strong beast!—if I had his muscle, I wouldn't let him put a finger on you."

"No, dear, I know you wouldn't," said Angela soothingly; having gained her point, she was generous. "And you would have carried me beautifully, I am sure; but it is as well not to run any risks, isn't it?"

Flossie mumbled something unintelligible.

"Very well, I shall bring over a large party this afternoon. And we'll stay as long as we can, and he can carry you out—to some place that I shall choose myself; and I'll see him safely off the premises before I leave you."

Angela was silent for a moment, and then she said gently:

"Flossie, why are you fussing so? You never fussed like this—before."

"Because—because I'm in a beastly funk, I suppose," burst out Flossie. He took her hand and patted it, and the tears brimmed up to Angela's eyes, for he showed his affection so seldom outwardly.

"Don't worry, Flossie," she said softly. "I shall be very good, and do just what you say I am to do. You always know best."

There was silence for quite a long time after that. Then she saw his face change suddenly, and his eyes began to twinkle.

"Beauty's gone," he said. "Did you know he was going? It seemed rather sudden."

Angela had the grace to blush.

"I did not think he would really go away," she said.

"Oh! you thought he would sit down and grump, and make you feel uncomfortable. No! Poor Beauty! he's hard hit. It was really you. It wasn't——"

"I could not help it," interrupted Angela quickly.

Just then Sheila came in, carrying the butter she had been churning, in a blue basin. Angela introduced her to Flossie, and he fell in love with her, as she knew he would, and paid her charming compliments about her cottage and everything connected with it, and stayed for the best part of the morning.

As he rose to go, he gave a poke with his stick to the basket which he had brought with him.

"You'll find some books and papers and your letters in there, and a few other trifles to keep you amused until some of us turn up later on," he said. "Now, remember, if I find that—that red-headed——"

"Flossie!"

"Well, that Bawbee Jock here before me, I shall be extremely annoyed. And I'll let him see that I am, so that he'll know not to do it again."

CHAPTER VIII

DURING the homeward walk Flossie was conscious of a depression which he could not shake off.

"It's coming—I feel it in my bones that it's coming," he soliloquised as he went along. "Of course I knew it must come some time, but that doesn't make it any easier once it's there. I'm sure I tried to put her off from the first. Perhaps that was the mistake. She was always given to taking odd fancies. From the days when she was in her perambulator she'd sooner have kissed a chimney-sweep than a duke. I believe she liked his dirty face."

When he had mounted to the top of the long ridge of moor, which ran east and west, and was a kind of vantage-ground from which he could view the scene on every side, he halted, and revolved slowly, until his gaze came back to the place he had started from.

"A fine inheritance!" he murmured. "And he's a chief—a kind of barbaric royalty." He heaved a deep sigh, which came from the bottom of his heart. "The place has a charm, too. It will claim her, and she'll answer to the call of it. She'll never be my little girl again, and God knows what I'm to do without her." He swished off the top of a bracken with his stick. "Yes, it's coming—I feel it in my bones; but as long

as she's up there alone in that God-forsaken place I won't have him hanging about her morning, noon, and night, to set all those infernal tongues clacking—I'll be shot if I will!" And he went on his way with a sad heart, and a ferocity of expression which sat quaintly on his round pink face.

Angela bore her disappointment philosophically, but it was a disappointment all the same. It was only the early part of the mornings which she was allowed to have to herself; but as Flossie provided her with a constant supply of books, she enjoyed those morning hours with a quiet delight which was one of the peculiarities of her adaptable nature.

Sheila would drag the big arm-chair out into the sunshine beside the kitchen door, and with the help of a stick and Sheila's arm she would hobble out to it, and with her foot propped up on another chair, would bask in the warmth, and read, or lie idly thinking and dreaming many dreams. No jarring sounds broke the peace of those still hours. The hum of the bees in the heather and the bubble and splash of the running water and the carolling of the larks were the only sounds audible.

Sheila always brought her her dinner out to the arm-chair; and Angela soon discovered that Sheila was a very good cook. She would have shamed a gay young grouse out of all knowledge of living vanity, could he have seen himself sitting on a dish and smelt the delicious flavour which pervaded the atmosphere when the cover was removed.

Sheila had smiled when Angela had praised her cooking.

"It is for the master himself that I must cook," she had answered; and Angela had laughed, and said she thought the master was very much to be envied.

But when the Ministering Angels, as Flossie called them, began to appear, the happy peace and simplicity vanished. The Fuzzy-Buzzy girls tried her the most sorely, because she never felt safe from their ministrations. They fell in love with Sheila and her cottage, and played in it the way they would have played in a doll's house, learning to bake oatcakes and to churn butter. Sheila tolerated them, putting to rights the mess which they littered about in her spotless kitchen with wonderful patience.

Lady Di and Dolly and some of the men would straggle in about tea-time, and there was always a conflict of opinion as to where the camp was to be pitched. The tea-hour was heralded by the appearance of piles of hampers and tea-baskets, and Angela would sit and watch the preparations.

"Lookers-on certainly do see most of the game," she said to Flossie one day. But she did not tell him, for it might have hurt his feelings, that nothing amused her so much as to watch Flossie himself and the attitude he had taken up towards poor Jock. The latter was given very plainly to understand exactly how much and how little was desired of him.

Punctually at four o'clock Angela would see, and she watched for them—she never deceived herself for a moment as to that—two figures coming over the hill. They were Jock and Dileas, the deerhound, faithful to his name, shadowing his master wherever he went. But Flossie, whether he was shooting, or whatever else he was doing, was always on the spot ten minutes sooner than Jock, and Jock knew that; and although he was hopelessly in love, he was too much of a gentleman to try to circumvent Flossie's vigilance.

Jock lived for that one blessed bit of the day when he

was allowed to carry Angela from the arm-chair, outside the cottage-door, to whatever place the Ministering Angels had chosen for their camping-ground. Even although Flossie was always at his heels, like a terrier after a huge mastiff, no one could tear from him those treasured moments when he actually held her in his arms; and it filled him with a kind of wild ecstasy of pride to know that she would not allow any one else to carry her. To officious suggestions of extempore chairs, and queen's-cushions, and such like, she would laugh and shake her head and say, "No! I won't trust any of them."

As they were starting, just as Jock was lifting her, she would put back the hood of Dolly's red Connemara cloak and whisper, so that even Flossie could not hear:

"Is it far away to-day? or is it quite near?"

If it was far away, Jock would say it was, with great satisfaction; and if it was near, he would say, "No; but it is a rough bit of ground, and I will have to go very slowly"—which meant finding stones where there were none, and altogether behaving in such an erratic manner that Flossie would call out from close behind: "Hi! what are you doing there?—staggering about like a drunk policeman. Stick to the path, can't you?"

Then Angela would laugh softly! and Jock knew that she knew that he had been found out.

So the days passed, and they were happy days to Angela, in spite of, or perhaps because of, the jars and friction which gave zest to the pleasures. It was glorious weather, still and warm; the mornings and evenings shadowed by a pearly mist, which lent a glamorous charm to the wild glen and the grandeur of the hills beyond.

If Jock felt inclined to kick against the pricks of destiny, he did not show it, but bore himself on all occasions with chivalrous dignity. And Flossie lost his fears.

But inwardly Jock was neither calm nor resigned. Sometimes he felt it was more than he could bear—to be near her and yet to be kept at a distance. On more than one occasion, when he had done what Flossie called his first turn at "body-snatching," he would absent himself on some excuse of business, and only return to the picnicking party when it was time to carry Angela back to the cottage.

When he went away, he always left Dileas on guard behind him. It was done quite unostentatiously; even Flossie was deceived, for Jock spoke to the dog in Gaelic, and therefore no one knew that Dileas was being left on trust for his master. Dileas did not like it. He looked at Jock pleadingly with his mournful eyes; but Jock had only to whisper something in his ear, and the old hound would lie down beside Angela on the heather, and no blandishments or offered dainties or any sort of bribery would tempt him from her side until Jock came back and relieved him from his guard.

Then a day arrived when Jock, crossing the hill on his daily errand, came to the spot where he invariably paused to look down at the little whitewashed cottage nestling in the glen below. He could always see Angela from there, because of the red Connemara cloak. If it was not on her shoulders, it was hanging over the back of the chair. That day no scarlet speck caught his eye; and his heart gave a great bound of fear, and then seemed to stand still.

What had happened? She had always been there, waiting; ready for him with a smile, and some pretty,

gay greeting on her lips. What did it mean? The faint sound of voices floated up to him, for sounds rose easily on the still air; and he saw that among the rocks and broken ground by the banks of the stream figures were moving, and the red cloak was amongst them. It was not moving; it was stationary, enthroned on a clump of heather.

Jock sat down on the bank, and Dileas came and laid his head on his knee and gazed up at him with mute sympathy. He knew that his master was in trouble.

Jock put his arm round the old deerhound's neck.

"She doesn't want me any more," he said. "She can walk alone now." And there was a break in his voice, for he spoke the words aloud; and Dileas drooped his tail sorrowfully. "Yes, you know all about it, old boy—don't you?" Jock looked at Dileas's nose. "She kissed you!—lucky dog! You don't know what a lucky dog you are."

Dileas wagged his tail and made a step suggestive of moving on; but Jock shook his head.

"No, we won't go down—not for a while, anyhow. I would not be a bit nearer to her there than I am here."

And so they sat on together, these two, on the hillside, and watched and waited—Jock in a state of stony misery, because he knew that this was the beginning of the end, and that now that she was free from her fetters she would take wing like a bird, and he would never see her again.

Strangely enough, it was the apathetic misery which circumstances forced upon him that was the means of his salvation. He sat and watched, and the longer he sat the more convinced he became that he could not bear the ordeal of bidding her good-bye before all that

chattering crowd and pretending that he was glad that she was well enough to walk without his help.

"I can't do it, Dileas!" he repeated at intervals—"I can't do it!"

Then the time came for the picnickers to pack up their baskets and go back across the moor—to dinner, and bridge, and hot rooms, and civilisation. They trooped off in twos and threes; the servants disappeared with the hill-ponies which had brought over the hampers; and one figure lingered behind the others, and Jock knew that it was Flossie; then it also vanished over the brow of the hill, and the red cloak was left behind, quite alone.

Jock caught in his breath quick. His fingers had been fondling the old hound's ear, and he pulled it so hard that Dileas drew himself away with a whimper from the loved hand, and then licked it apologetically.

Jock rose to his feet. He hesitated for a second, and then went swinging down the hillside, straight to the spot where the red cloak made a bright patch of colour against the green bank.

And Angela saw him coming, and her cheeks went first pink and then white; and he came and stood in front of her, and looked at her and said nothing.

She saw, and understood. She knew by the expression in his eyes that he had passed through a great conflict. Her woman's instinct told her that he had been watching, and it told her what his thoughts had been; and a yearning pity and love for him welled up in her heart. She made a vow with herself that she would not allow him to suffer; that she could not; that, in spite of conventionality and laws and prejudices, she would break down the barrier that separated him from her.

Jock only looked his misery. The knowledge that she could do without him, that she was willing to do

without him, was at present with him here beside her as it had been on the hillside, and it paralysed speech.

"How am I to let him understand that Flossie made me walk?" said Angela to herself—"that he said it was all nonsense for me to pretend that I could not—and made Sheila confess that it would be good for me to try to walk?"

The colour came back fitfully to her cheeks. She felt afraid—not because she was uncertain of him, but because she knew that he was so sincere and honest, and she wished to make her meaning so that he would understand. She looked up at him, and the smile of welcome he loved to see was in her eyes, and the sweet lips were quivering a little. She laid her hand on the heather beside her, and he obeyed the mute request and sat down. He looked at her for one moment, with a dumb passion of appeal in his eyes, and then turned his head quickly aside, and sat staring straight in front of him as though he saw nothing.

Angela leant forward, with her elbow resting on her knee, and her chin propped in the hollow of her hand, and watched him, broodingly, meditatively, like a mother who is watching her child, and wondering which will be the best and most loving way of helping him out of some trouble which he is keeping from her.

"He will never speak. He has some terribly earnest reason on his dear conscience which will not let him speak, and it is horribly cruel to sit still and allow him to keep on breaking his heart. I don't care whether it is unwomanly or what it is—and there is no one to listen, so it does not matter—but if he won't speak, I—I must!" she argued with herself.

"Why did you not come down this afternoon?" she asked softly.

She saw a kind of shudder pass through him; the muscles of his throat contracted as though he were swallowing something bitter and hard, and then the pent-up bitterness and hardness broke forth, the floodgates opened:

"Because you don't want me any more. You can do without me now." And he turned his head away again quickly, so that she could only see the back of his round blue bonnet.

She waited for nearly a whole minute, but he did not move; and then she stretched out her hand again and laid it beside his, almost touching one of the pleats of his kilt.

"That is not true," she said gently. "I—do want you."

A breathless silence followed. It was as if that little hand, lying there, mesmerised him. He did not attempt to touch it. He simply sat and stared at it.

"Is he afraid of me? or is he afraid of himself?" Angela wondered, and moved her hand. He thought that she was going to take it away, and his own closed over it convulsively.

"Oh dear! How strong he is," she murmured. "It's like a vice."

Then he turned and looked at her with a wonderment of love and pleading in his eyes, which made her heart ache and throb. He slowly unclasped his fingers. She could feel how they trembled, and he looked down at the little hand which lay trustingly in the palm of his.

"Do you mean——" he stammered hoarsely.

Angela's eyes were swimming in tears. His face seemed a blur, and her own voice sounded like a faint, fluttering whisper coming from a long distance.

"I—I mean you to—keep it."

A strangled sob was smothered in Jock's throat, and he put his other hand over hers and held it—not like a vice, but with a strength which told that nothing would ever take it from him; and they sat together for some moments in a silence which drew them nearer to each other than words.

Angela wanted him to speak—to hear his voice. She wanted to know why he had not told her before that he loved her. She wanted to know what was the trouble which had made him so miserable, and doubtful and wavering. She wanted to love him and comfort him and mother him.

"I don't believe he knows, poor dear, that he has not said any of the things that he ought to have said. I'. .ad to do all the forwardness, and I'll have to go on ..oing it, if I am to help him. I must find out about these reasons, and why he did not wish me to misunderstand, and everything that has been making him so unhappy. I must find out everything—for his own sake."

Jock did not know how she did it—it was done so sweetly and gently and lovingly. But then, she loved him very dearly.

The story is not to be told in Jock's words, because he told it very badly—partly for the reason that he was holding Angela's hand all the time and looking into her eyes; and partly because it was a story which, retold by the woman who loved him and who could read between the lines, was a true story; and Angela told it in its real light to Flossie the next day.

The evening shadows were beginning to creep up the hillside, and the golden glory of sunset was ga hering in the western sky, and its radiance was ref cted in Jock's face, and a certain awe as well.

"What is he thinking about?" Angela asked herself. "He's far away in the clouds. He imagines that I am an angel, and must not be treated like a mortal."

Then Sheila's voice was heard in the distance. The dew was falling, and it was growing cold.

"I suppose I ought to go in," suggested Angela.

"But you can't walk," said Jock—"I mean, you don't need to."

He had come down from the clouds with a start, and there was a look of apprehension in his eyes. He clung desperately to the hand which still lay in his.

"Perhaps one walk a day is enough for the first time," answered Angela. "And—Flossie is not here. Oh, how funny it has all been! Didn't you hate it all? Do say that you did."

But Jock was too intent on lifting her, and carrying her in exactly the way he knew she liked to be carried, to spare a thought for anything else.

Perhaps it was only when he held her in his arms that he really did come down from the clouds, and find that he was very human. He found it out before he had gone many paces; and if Flossie had been there, he would certainly have told him to steady his steps and look out where he was going.

He carried her into the little kitchen, where the chair stood ready beside the fire. The room was in shadow, and only the fire-glow shone upon his face. Angela saw the light in his eyes, and she turned her head aside and hid it on his shoulder.

"Oh, what a—fraud you are! I thought you were so—shy, and so——!"

It was some few minutes later, and she was sitting upright in the old arm-chair. She put up her hand.

"How you have ruffled my hair!"

"I like it ruffled!" said Jock. His voice seemed to have gained a new tone; it was full and strong. He caught her hand. "Leave it like that. It all twists in little curls about your ears. It's much prettier than it was before." He sat down on the wooden stool which was always drawn in beside the fire, and looked up at her. "Is it really true?" he said. "Am I in my right senses?"

"No, I don't think you are," she answered. "You won't feel real—uncomfortably real—until you have told Flossie what you've done."

His eyes sharpened. They looked very blue, and a kind of fighting glint came into them.

"He can't take you away from me," he said.

"No; but—I wouldn't hurt him for the world. We must be very nice to him. He has always taken care of me, you see."

Jock sighed heavily.

"He won't think I'm good enough. I'm not! How did I ever dare to tell you—to ask you—to speak—to——?"

Angela blushed.

"You didn't. It was all me. You've never proposed to me properly yet."

But Jock was very much in earnest.

"We'll be so poor," he said; and his eyes were very troubled as they met hers. "Do you understand? I mean really poor. If it was not that I have heard you say so often that you loved living in this little cottage, and that you were so happy with simple things, I would never have dared to——" He glanced round the plain, whitewashed kitchen. "I haven't anything much better than this to give you."

"I don't want anything better," answered Angela.

She spoke low, and she bent over him. His blue bonnet was lying on the floor and the firelight caught his hair where there was that little crimp in it above his temples. She was so near; he had not to strain his ears to listen. "We are going to be poor together. I would rather live with—my Bawbee Jock in a cottage like this than in a palace with any one else." Her voice fell to a soft whisper. "'Bawbee Jock!' I shall always love you by that name. Always—always! Because it was the beginning of everything."

Presently the clock on the wall struck an ominous number of strokes which made them both start and look at it in astonishment.

"I suppose I ought to go," said Jock. "When may I come back again? What time to-morrow?" He looked at her with an intensity of anxiety in his eyes. "You won't go away and leave me, will you?—I mean, if there is no one to keep you from me. You said that you were very relationless. Do you remember? You won't keep me waiting long—promise me that you won't. Promise me that you will marry me soon?"

The colour was flushing her cheeks; her lashes were lowered, and he could not see the expression in her eyes.

"Say that you won't go away—that you won't leave me," he pleaded in a low voice.

"I can't promise anything until—I have told Flossie," she murmured hesitatingly. "I think——" She raised her eyes, and added quickly, "Let me speak to him myself first. You see, I understand him; and—I think it would be better. Don't come to-morrow until after Flossie has been here. Do you mind very much?"

"I do mind—very much," he answered. "But, perhaps you know best."

Shortly after that he said his last good-night and went away.

On the brow of the hill he stopped. Dileas, who was following him like a grey shadow, stopped too. The moors were shrouded in the evening mist; the hills stood out against the pale amber of the darkening sky; a bank of purple cloud lay low on the horizon line; and one golden gleam of light shone like a beacon from out of the gathering gloom.

On every side stretched Glenmoira; and it was still his own.

"I am fighting it for her sake now," he murmured to himself—"for her dear sake."

CHAPTER IX

THE next day no Ministering Angels appeared at Sheila's cottage to work havoc in her tidy kitchen and harass Angela with their importunate attentions.

The morning passed quietly and peacefully, and Angela was very happy. She had so much to think about, and her thoughts were sweet and serious; and many times her eyes wandered to the ridge of the hill opposite, and she wondered what Jock was doing and whether he had climbed to the top of the ridge from his side, and looked down to make sure that the little cottage in the glen below had not taken wings and flown away in the night.

After she had finished her early dinner, she asked Sheila to bring her knitting and to sit down beside her and tell her stories. Books did not satisfy her to-day. She wanted real life. She made Sheila tell her stories of Glenmoira and of the days when Jock's father had held rule there; and then of Jock's life now, among his people.

She loved to hear Sheila speak Jock's name. Her voice seemed to linger on it with a reverent affection, and she loved to listen to Sheila's description of the clachan, and the old church, and the old minister, Mr. MacPherson, who had christened, and married, and buried all the members of the chief's family during his term of office.

Sheila's description of Jock, going to church every Sunday accompanied by Dileas, interested her very much. It seemed that it was the custom of Highland dogs to accompany their masters to church, and that they behaved quite as decorously as human beings.

In the summer-time, if the weather was fine, Sheila told her, the services were held out of doors on the hill-side; and Angela said she thought that was a most beautiful and picturesque idea.

"It will be also a marriage that you can be seeing on the hill-side," said Sheila.

"A marriage!" exclaimed Angela. "Have you ever seen one? Oh, do tell me about it!" And she listened with intense earnestness to Sheila's description of a marriage which she had herself witnessed the summer before in the glen, when the ceremony had taken place out-of-doors.

Angela was very silent and pre-occupied for a long time after Sheila had ceased speaking. Then she gave a long, deep-drawn sigh, and there was a catch at the end of it, like that of a child who is standing on the brink of an unknown, unexplored land of mystery.

"Sheila," she said, "do you know what Donald said to me when he was told to welcome me to Glenmoira?"

Sheila smiled.

"It is himself that has told me the words that he has said," she answered.

"'It is to the glens that you have come, and it is in the glens that you will stay,'" murmured Angela.

For a little while she remained very still; and Sheila did not speak either, but sat with her knitting lying idle on her lap and that strange, far-seeing light in her eyes.

So the hours of the peaceful day crept on, and Angela

was very happy, although a little nervous and expectant at the thought of what she was going to say to Flossie about Jock. She hoped that he would come alone, but that seemed almost too good to be allowed to happen. When tea-time drew near, and still there was no sign of either Flossie or the Ministering Angels, she began to regret that she had told Jock so decidedly that he must stay away.

She had grown so accustomed to counting the minutes until the kitchen clock struck four, that she felt a sense of loss and blankness stealing over her when the chimes ticked off the hour and she realised that they meant nothing.

"I have burnt my boats with a vengeance," she said to herself with a rueful smile; and she asked Sheila to give her Donald's stick, and began to practise walking backwards and forwards on a narrow strip of level ground outside the cottage door.

"I believe I am ready for anything now!" she told herself, and continued her walk until she reached the place where she had sat with Jock the evening before.

"That is far enough," she murmured, sinking down on the yielding heather; and presently she saw Sheila coming out with her tea.

Sheila was carrying a tray, with the teapot on it, and scones and oat-cakes and honey; and setting everything down on the heather, she had only just disappeared into the cottage again when Angela saw Flossie coming down the glen-path from the moor.

"Oh, there you are at last!" she cried. "I am so glad to see you. Call out to Sheila to bring another cup, and I will give you some tea."

But Flossie came straight to where she was sitting and sank down with an exhausted air beside her.

"Never mind a cup," he said; "give it me in the slop-basin. Lord! I could drink anything! Put in lots of milk to cool it, my throat feels like a lime-kiln. Daniel's fiery furnace was nothing to it."

"You poor dear thing!" exclaimed Angela.

Flossie had emptied the basin and held it out to be refilled before she began to ask questions.

"There! I feel better now," he said, taking a large silk handkerchief from his pocket and wiping his little downy moustache.

"Tell me all about it," said Angela. "Why have I been left in such blissful peace? Not by you, I mean, but by the Ministering Angels. Where are they? Who are they ministering to?"

"Their own selfish selves," answered Flossie. "They've gone, my dear child."

"Gone!" echoed Angela. "Like Antoinette?"

Flossie smiled grimly.

"Not morals this time—it's scarlet fever!"

"Scarlet fever! Who?"

"No one that you know. One of the servants. She went about, poor wretch! until she collapsed—in public! You can imagine the scare that followed! It happened just as we were going to dress for dinner last night."

"But, Flossie, do you mean to say that they have really all gone? How could they in the time?"

"My dear, it was like a football scrum. Doesn't my exhausted appearance speak for itself? Some one had to help—and——"

"Oh, I know what that means!" cried Angela. "You have been managing, and helping, and planning and doing everything for everybody. You always let yourself be victimised. It's too bad the way people take advantage of you."

Flossie shrugged his shoulders.

"I've been doing chauffeur most of the day," he remarked. "We've had two motors going since streak of dawn. It's been a sweeping exodus. No; I must give credit where credit is due. One little maid stuck to the colours—a veritable Trojan."

"And what has become of the poor scarlet-fever thing?" asked Angela.

"She's shut up—isolated, The doctor managed that. A grim-looking beggar! It would take a pretty nippy saint to slip through his fingers, I should imagine." Flossie took out his cigarette-case and, lighting a cigarette, lay back against the heather and tilted his cap over his eyes. "It's been very fussing," he said. "And—and some of it was rather trying."

"Kind Flossie!" said Angela. "You are so good; you always rise to an emergency."

Flossie patted his chest.

"Yes, my dear, I'm a man of parts. It's very useful."

"What are you going to do—yourself?" asked Angela.

"I? Stay and look after you, of course. You don't suppose I was going to bolt and leave you? By the way, Dolly sent all kinds of messages. She was so worried being sorry for every one. She had a bad time."

"Poor Dolly!" said Angela. Her lip curled a little. "I suppose Mr. Potter was amongst the first to fly?"

Flossie did not answer for a moment. He was apparently engrossed in watching a honey-laden bee trying to take flight from a bunch of heather beside him. Then he remarked irrelevantly:

"The Devereux left two days ago. I forgot to mention it. And—I heard Monty giving out at lunch

yesterday—before the scare, of course—that his medical adviser had ordered him to Homburg."

Angela flushed hotly.

"Do you think that was true?" she said.

Flossie shrugged his shoulders.

"Monty's pretty useful at economising the truth. He's—taking Dolly with him."

"Flossie!" exclaimed Angela indignantly.

"Oh! he likes to keep a halo of respectability about his head if it costs him nothing," answered Flossie. He picked out a lump of moss from the bank. "And Dolly can't rebel. She never does fight, you know. She—she's like a little white dove in the hand of the fowler." The lump of moss hit the bee. "Oh, damn! It's a beastly hard world for women. There—I feel better. Sorry, dear, for using bad language, but I couldn't help it."

"Flossie, why do you allow it?" burst out Angela vehemently. "He's not a man—he's a brute! Why don't you—run away with her? She would go—she's so accustomed to doing what you tell her; and—I don't believe it would be wrong."

Flossie shook his head.

"That's just it, dear. She's so accustomed to trusting me, that—perhaps she would; and I'd be a cad to take advantage. You see, she doesn't—understand. I play the fool so well. No one finds me out."

"Flossie, how can you? I know——"

"What every woman knows?" quoted Flossie, smiling; but the smile was very small and thin.

"What every woman does not know!" declared Angela, with sweeping scorn. "That you are the straightest, best friend any woman ever had. And oh! I am so sorry—so dreadfully sorry."

"Thank you, dear."

Flossie shaded his eyes with his hand for a minute and then he blew his nose. There was a lengthened pause, and he laughed—a whimsical, rather pathetic laugh.

"My dear, when nature planned me out, she didn't cast me for a Lothario or a Don Juan." He took hold of the frilly skirts of his shooting-coat and flapped them derisively. "Think of the legal proceedings! What kind of figure would I cut in the witness-box? Can't you hear the papers? 'Under a brilliant fire of cross-examination, which lasted all day, the co-respondent maintained an attitude of remarkable equanimity.' . . . Then they'd stick in something about my clothes, and pile on the adjectives. No, no, my dear; I'm not cast for the part." He lit a fresh cigarette. "Now then, to change the subject," he said, sitting up and speaking briskly. "What's to be done about you? By the way, where's the body-snatcher? Where's Bawbee Jock?"

"He has not been here to-day," said Angela, with a suspicious conciliatoriness in her voice. "I can walk alone now, Flossie. I came out here all by myself. Isn't it splendid?"

Flossie nodded.

"Capital! Then you can make plans for moving on."

Angela said nothing; and Flossie, with a facetiousness born of misguided confidence, ran on glibly:

"It's time you did make up your mind what you're going to do. This kind of mongrel existence couldn't last much longer. You'd either have had to take to wearing a nightcap and settling down here for good, or"—he laughed—"or marry Bawbee Jock!"

Angela's cheeks went very pink and her eyes grew wide and frightened.

"I—I hope you won't mind very much, but——" She gave a gasp and took the plunge without allowing her courage to slip. "Flossie, I—am going to marry Bawbee Jock. I—have promised to marry him."

She held out her hand, and her eyes and lips pleaded eloquently.

CHAPTER X

THE blow had fallen—at the moment when he least expected it. Flossie did not need to question, or to look at her even, to know how much it all meant. She was in sweet, serious earnest; he had not studied her moods from the time that she could only express her thoughts in baby language, not to know that.

"Flossie!" whispered Angela, after a few minutes' throbbing silence. "Do say something! Don't look like that, as if—as if—— Oh, I never saw you look like that before. You want me to be happy, don't you?"

"Yes," answered Flossie mechanically, "I want you to be happy; but—are you sure he can make you happy? My dear, you know so little about him; and what you do know——" He took off his cap and rumpled up the fluff of hair above his forehead. "I'm sure what I told you wasn't particularly taking."

Angela leant forward eagerly.

"That was all a mistake, every bit of it. I can't think how you, who are so good at understanding, did not guess, or get to know, or find out somehow, that it was a mistake I suppose because—you did not fall in love with hin..

"I expect that had something to do with it," said Flossie drily.

"It was all a mistake," reiterated Angela. "I will

tell you the real story. He told it to me last night Yes, we sat out here until it was almost dark. He put things so that sometimes I could have hugged him, because they weren't a bit true, although he tried to make me think they were. But I am going to tell you the story in the way I know it to be true. Now listen. I think you had better light a fresh cigarette."

Flossie lit his cigarette and, leaning back against the bank, half shut his eyes. He did not wish her to see how much they might tell, and he mumbled something to the effect that she might "go ahead, and stick to facts."

"Not so very long ago," began Angela, "Glenmoira was like a little kingdom. Jock's father was a great chief, and his mother was very beautiful, and they kept open house for weeks at a time. There were meetings and gatherings, and pipers of course, and torch-light processions—the clansmen with their claymores. You see, I've got all the names of the things right, haven't I? And——"

"Did Bawbee Jock tell you all this piffle?" interposed Flossie. "Rather swagger of him, if he did."

"No! He never swaggers—you know he doesn't," retorted Angela indignantly. "Sheila has told me things. She tells beautiful stories."

"Humph!" grumped Flossie, "so it seems. Well, go on."

"I'm making it romantic and feudal and out of the common," said Angela.

"Is it all to show why Bawbee Jock had to take to screwing? Because his ancestors squandered their heritage in riotous living?" asked Flossie.

"You really are most interrupting. Do listen and keep quiet. The old chief was a splendid chief. He

could quite afford to be a king? Up here, you know, where he lived—in the way that his ancestors did."

"On what they could steal from their neighbours," murmured Flossie. "I've always heard that Highlanders were a thieving lot."

But Angela went on with her story unheedingly.

"The old chief kept up all the ancient customs and traditions in the way that his forefathers had done before him for generations. And he brought up his son to feel the same as he did—about his responsibilities to his people, and what he owed to the honour of the old name. You're listening, Flossie, aren't you?"

Flossie's response was inaudible.

"You can imagine what Glenmoira is to—J-Jock," Angela stumbled a little over the name. "Think what it must be to him to see some one else here—taking his place. He is such a good sportsman, too!—you know that. He sees the good in everything that has to do with Nature." The misty look of dreaminess came into her eyes. She went on shyly: "I found that out for myself that day when he asked me to go into his butt with him, and we walked home across the moor afterwards. I—think it must have begun that day. It was the kind of difference, the contrast—getting away from all that was conventional to what was really real: the strong, sweet, pure things of Nature, things which have not changed for centuries: the hills and the moors, with their memories of what has been! Think of what scenes these places have witnessed, Flossie! The fights!" Angela's cheek flushed. "Jock's ancestors were tremendous fighters. They raised a whole regiment once. And the regiment still exists. Jock's father was in it, and Jock went into it. But I'm hurrying on too quick."

"My dear, I don't object to a little skipping," remarked Flossie politely.

"Of course he went to school like any ordinary boy, but he always loved to get back to Glenmoira and into his kilt, and—be Highland again. And now I'm coming to the important bit. There was a brother, and he was younger than Jock, and his name was Alister. I don't think he can have been like Jock in any possible way. Jock says he was very good-looking, and——"

"That settles it," said Flossie. "You needn't explain."

Angela continued, ignoring the interruption:

"He was a selfish, spoilt creature! Every one seems to have spoilt him. His mother worshipped him, and gave in to him in everything, and made Jock give in to him too. From the time that Jock was almost a baby himself, he was always told that he must give up the best of everything to Alister. Of course Jock didn't put it in that way to me. He made it seem that, because he was the elder, he should take care of Alister. But I know! I read between the lines. I don't believe Jock has ever been properly loved. Flossie, do you hear? Do you realise what that means?"

"Yes, yes, my dear. But—I'm anxious to get to some point in the story. Can't you skip on a chapter or two?"

"I thought I was making it so interesting," sighed Angela.

"So you are. But—what next? You left him going into the regiment that had been raised by his ancestor."

"Jock went abroad with his regiment, the—Highlanders; and Alister went into the Guards."

"The Blues," said Flossie. "Alister Mackenzie! Beauty thought he knew about him, but I knew more. A nice young scamp."

"I'm sure he must have been," said Angela quickly. "Jock, of course, is loyal and won't say so. But I must hurry on or else you will get bored. The troubles began after Jock's father died, because then Alister was able to go his own way. Jock was abroad, and his mother would not live at Glenmoira; she wanted to be near Alister. And so Glenmoira was left deserted and everything went wrong. I don't know exactly what happened about Alister. It had to do with money, of course; Jock won't give him away. It must have been something very bad—disgraceful! Jock's mother sent for him to come home, and he got leave, and came back as soon as he could; but Alister had bolted. Yes! He had run away! Right out of the country, and left his mother heart-broken—literally heart-broken. She was dying. Flossie, are you listening? I want you to pay attention to this bit very particularly."

"Yes, yes, my dear; I'm listening," said Flossie.

"She died! Really of a broken heart. And do you know what she made Jock promise? That, if he could not save Alister—his name and reputation, and pay off this disgraceful—whatever it was—in any other way, he would sell Glenmoira. Only think of what that meant! The place he loved so dearly, and his people, and all that his father had brought him up to be to them. And he promised. Glenmoira is entailed; but he could break the entail with Alister's consent, because Alister was the next heir. His mother knew that, of course, and she made him promise that, if it was to save Alister—if nothing else would save him—he would break the entail, and sell Glenmoira. He has not done it yet; he has sacrificed everything to prevent it. But—he gave his word. And it is always hanging over him that he may have to keep it."

Angela paused and touched Flossie's shoulder.

"Now you understand," she said. "Are you not sorry for having misjudged him? Not that I mind your having called him Bawbee Jock," she added quickly. "I love that name—I always shall."

Flossie fidgeted and straightened his cap.

"Well—yes! I retract what I may have said under the influence of a common misunderstanding," he admitted. "But how was I to know?"

"I knew—I guessed there was something from the first," answered Angela.

"And so all his, by way of screwing, has been to pay off that young scamp's debts?" said Flossie.

"Yes," said Angela. Her voice saddened. "It is the hopelessness of it that has taken all the heart out of Jock. He has started Alister afresh, time after time; and it is no use. He can't keep straight; and then he comes back on Jock to help him. Jock owns himself that it is hopeless. He says he can't throw him over, and yet it is like pouring water into a sieve to try to help him. Flossie, think what Jock has had to give up!—his position, his rank really! He won't go about and stay with people. He says he can't, because they would not understand. They would expect him to take his proper place as"—Angela raised her head proudly—"as the Chief of Glenmoira, which he is. He shields Alister, you see, and no one would understand why he could not do the things which were expected of him. He lives up here all alone, and tries to keep things together, so that if possible he can save Glenmoira. Sheila told me such a pathetic bit of the story, which Jock could not. You know, Flossie, these Highlanders are just like children about their chief. They expect to be led and cared for by him. When Jock came back

to live amongst them, [illegible] came crowding round him, crying really like chil[illegible], and imploring him never to go away again, but to stay with them always, and take care of them. Now, Flossie, do you understand? I think the lonely life he has led has made him dreadfully sensitive—too sensitive, perhaps. I think he thought that he had no right to be happy. That because he was so poor he had no right to—well, to ask any one to marry him."

Flossie sat up. He tapped the end of a fresh cigarette meditatively against his knee as he felt for his match-box, and looked at Angela out of the corners of his eyes.

"It strikes me he didn't lose much time once he did get his chance," he remarked drily. "Pretty good cheek of him to wait until I was out of sight, and then walk in. It seems to me as if he knew his way about pretty usefully."

Angela blushed.

"It was my fault—I mean—it hurt him dreadfully to see that I could walk alone. It was that did it. He thought I did not want him any longer; and I could not allow him to be miserable, and so I had to tell him. I—don't quite remember what I told him; but that's how it happened. Now you know! And you are going to be the dear that you have always been, Flossie, and—help me. Because I'm going to do it. I'm going to marry him." She stopped, a little breathless, but she looked very determined.

"Angela! Angela!" was all that Flossie could manage to say.

He felt weak and helpless. She had always been sweetness and obedience itself to him on occasions when she knew that he knew best; but this was an occasion

in which no one could judge for her but herself, and she knew that.

"I hope he knows what a lucky devil he is," he said. "I hope he understands you. Neither of you knows much about each other, so far as I can see. My dear child, I feel all this very deeply; you've been a great charge to me. He's taking a big responsibility on his shoulders. I hope he realises that."

Angela had been sitting very still, with her eyes on the distant hills. A soft light was shining in them when she turned and fixed them on Flossie's face.

"I—I don't think he realises anything—but—me," she said, half under her breath. "Yes, really! It's beautiful, and quite adorable of him; but he—he doesn't want anything—but me."

Flossie paused in the act of striking a match.

"Do you mean to say," he exclaimed, "that the man's such a benighted fool as not to—— Good Lord, Angela! Does he know anything about you at all? Does he even know if you're respectable?"

Angela shook her head slowly and kept her eyes fixed on Flossie's.

"It's just me," she reiterated softly. "He wants—me; that's all. And—that's all that I want him to want."

Flossie smothered an exclamation. He threw away the match and laid down his cigarette unlighted.

"Angela, what do you mean?" he said.

And she answered him, very slowly and deliberately.

He sat for some time after she had ceased speaking, staring at her with a kind of stupefaction on his face; and then he rose, and walked over to the bank which overhung the stream, and stood for a few minutes look-

ing down at the running water. Then he came back and took up his position in front of her. He had a great deal to say, and he could always speak best when he was on his feet. At the end of half an hour he was still on his feet, and Angela was still listening to him. Her face was as white as the handkerchief which she was twisting round and round in her fingers, but it was set and determined. Flossie's cheeks were as pink as Angela's were white.

"Ridiculous and impossible!—impossible and most ridiculous!" he kept repeating with vehement persistency; but it was the persistency of baffled impotence. He had not shaken her determination by a hair's breadth. This was a new Angela to him. He was not pitting his strength against the whim of a romantic girl: this was a woman, who knew her own heart and her own mind, and had the will and the determination to abide by her purpose.

Flossie stopped at last. He was still standing, and his expression was one of puzzled despair.

The set look on Angela's face melted. She smiled, and stretching out her hand, took his, and pulled him down beside her.

"You are going to let me have my own way. I know you are," she said persuasively. "And I am going to be married in the way I want to be married; and you are going to help me, and be my angel of a guardian, and give me away your very own self—you are, aren't you?"

"Angela!" groaned Flossie helplessly.

Angela smiled again, this time radiantly.

"Flossie, you can't think how beautiful Scotch marriages are—so easy and simple."

"Are they? What heathen rite constitutes a Scotch

marriage? Child! child! I don't like it at all"; and Flossie groaned again.

Angela raised her head with dignity.

"You forget, Flossie, that Jock is a chief. I believe he could command a marriage just like royalty! He has a minister of his own who marries and buries all the family. You don't know all about these beautiful old Highland customs; but I do. Sheila told me this morning about a marriage she had seen herself; and it was out-of-doors—on the hill-side, with——"

Flossie raised his voice.

"My dear girl, if you think that I'm going to lend my presence to any theatrical experiments about things that I don't understand the meaning of, you are very much mistaken." He pushed back his cap and rubbed his forehead impatiently. "What the dickens am I to do with you? Do you know what you want yourself?"

The colour flushed up to Angela's cheeks. She was looking beyond Flossie to the heather-clad slope above, to where a little green track wound like an emerald ribbon in and out of the patches of purple bloom and bracken. It passed Sheila's cottage and, wandering on to the right of it, lost itself under the drooping branches of a mountain ash.

In the shade of the tree, under the canopy of lace-like foliage and clusters of scarlet berries, which glistened in the afternoon sunlight, lay a long, grey slab of rock. Its level top was smooth as a table, and about its base clustered a tiny forest of oak-fern and nodding clumps of harebell.

She pointed.

"Do you see that lovely tree? They call it a rowan tree here. Isn't it a pretty name? And do you see that long grey stone underneath it, like a table? I—

should like to be married there! The Bible would lie on that stone—that would be the altar; and the old minister would stand behind it, and Jock and I would stand in front—and he would marry us. We would want nothing but the Bible and—a wedding ring." Her eyes, sweet and grave, with a shadow of awe in their depths, sought Flossie's beseechingly. "Think how beautiful it would be! Where could you find a grander church? The blue sky above, and the song of the birds and the ripple of the water for music. Heaven and the angels looking down on us: nothing to jar and fret; nothing to spoil the solemnity, and the reality of what we are going to promise to be to each other." Her voice trembled. "Don't you think a marriage like that would be very near to what God meant it to be?" She slipped her hand into the unresponsive one beside her. "I believe I've made you feel it just as I feel it. Let yourself go, Flossie, and be good and kind; and help me to have the wish of my heart."

Flossie rubbed away something out of the corner of his eye which might have been an eyelash, but Angela knew that it was not.

"Well, dear," he said rather huskily, "I won't make rash promises. I'll find out if it's possible. And I'll have a very serious conversation with—Bawbee Jock before I give my unconditional consent. And I must see that 'family minister.' Where does he live? In the same God-forsaken place as you're going to?" His fingers closed tightly over the hand which had crept into his. "Dear child, have you thought of that?—the loneliness, the isolation? These wilds are positively cut off from civilisation in the winter time. Have you thought of all that? How do I know that he knows how to take care of you?"

"I'm not afraid. I trust him. I would trust him with my life—I am going to," she answered.

Flossie sat for some time in meditative silence; then he said abruptly:

"How much longer do you intend to stay here?"

Angela blushed.

"I don't know. I can't live on here much longer with Sheila, can I? And I can't go back to Glenmoira."

"I suppose he wants you to marry him straight away—a kind of royal command," said Flossie drily.

"Well—he wants to marry me very soon."

"Humph!" grunted Flossie. "These red-haired chaps are smouldering volcanoes. As you're set on marrying him, you'd best keep that in mind."

He was lost in meditation again for some minutes. And then Angela heard him chuckling softly to himself.

"What a nice sell it will be for——" He chuckled again. "You'll hurt a good many people's feelings, my dear."

"I don't want to hurt any one's feelings," said Angela. "And I am doing nothing that I am ashamed of." She drew herself up. "I am proud of the man that I am going to marry. I am proud of everything that belongs to him, and it's all quite open."

"Very open!" said Flossie, glancing at the rowan tree. "Supposing it's a wet day. Will you be married under an umbrella?"

"Don't make fun of my beautiful idea," pleaded Angela. She looked up at the sky. "This lovely weather is going to last for ages—for another week, at any rate."

"Are you going to be married in a week?" exclaimed Flossie, aghast.

But Angela did not answer. She was looking away

to where the sunset light was bathing the hill-tops. The day was dying, but there would be a to-morrow; and to-morrow would bring her lover back to her again.

"I must be off," said Flossie. "It's getting late."

Angela started, and returned to earth.

"You have been so good," she said. "I could not have done it without you; nothing would have been right. You will always be my guardian, won't you? And if people ask questions, you will know what to say." She broke into a rippling laugh. "Flossie, I would so love to hear the things that you will say when people ask you questions. And you will have to own that you were at the wedding, and you said—you remember?—that you never went to weddings, because you were afraid of being kissed." She bent forward. "You have been such a dear! I should like to kiss you—now."

"For goodness' sake, don't!" said Flossie, looking over his shoulder. "How do you know that Bawbee Jock isn't watching from behind one of those bunches of heather?"

"But it would not matter if he were. He would not hurt you."

"I'd rather not give him the chance. Highlanders are only half civilised. He'd have that spiky thing he carries about in his stocking stabbed into my back before I had time to run away."

Angela laughed.

"Very well. You can imagine that you've been kissed."

"Thanks, dear; I will. It's safer! Now really I must be off. I have a hundred things to see to." He rose and shook himself and pulled down the skirts of his coat. Then he sighed. "To-morrow, I suppose, I'm

to take up the rôle of heavy father and interview that red——"

"Flossie!" Angela held up her finger. "I won't have him called names." Then she added in a conciliatory tone, "Shall I send him to see you? I would rather not be too near, when—you meet."

Flossie considered for a moment.

"He'll be here at cock-crow, I suppose? Yes, send him straight on to me. He can come to me first; and after I've done with him, you can have what's left. Keep him out of the way! I'm going to make an expedition over to that clachan to-morrow, or whatever you call it, and spy the land for myself. I don't want him prowling round and trying to stuff me with the show bits. I'm going to see things as they are!" He stooped and picked up his stick. "I'll let you know the result, and if I find anything I don't like, you'll hear about it, you may be quite sure of that."

"Good-night, Flossie dear," said Angela; "and thank you so much. I hope you will be taken care of. Can the little maid—the Trojan—cook? Will she be able to give you some dinner?"

"She'll try—she'll stick at nothing. You should have seen my lunch. A row of cutlets with long legs. No petticoats—frills, you know; and a spadeful of potatoes in the largest dish she could find."

Angela watched him disappear over the brow of the hill. She saw him silhouetted against the sky-line; and he paused to wave his stick to her before he vanished from sight.

CHAPTER XI

STRETCHED his full length on the heather, with his head pillowed upon his folded arms, Jock lay and kept vigil with himself and the God whom, in the simple sincerity of his boyhood's faith, he believed looked down on him from the star-lit sky above.

It was the eve of his wedding-day. To-morrow his love would give him the precious gift of her sweet self, and the immensity of what that meant seemed almost more than he could bear. He must be alone with himself: to take communion with the divine spirit of Nature which had taught him to reverence all that was pure and good; and to cleanse his soul in the presence of his Maker.

Standing on the threshold of the new life which would break with the rising dawn, those past days of waiting now seemed to him like a dream. There had been times when he had been afraid; when with trembling fear he had not dared to allow himself to believe that the reality of his dream could be accomplished; times when in the dark watches of the night he had stretched out his arms and cried dumbly in the passion of his longing, "Give her to me, at any cost! I cannot live without her."

The material details of that waiting time had left him

with an odd sense of irresponsibility. All his life he had been the one on whom responsibility fell. He never remembered the day when it had been otherwise; but he was conscious of no resentment, or feeling of having been put aside. He did not try to analyse his state of mind. Perhaps he was not normal enough to do so. One circumstance had brought home to him the reality of the step which he was about to take; and that was when, the Sunday before, sitting in the little box-like gallery of the old church, he had listened to the proclamation of the banns of marriage between "John Murdoch Mackenzie, bachelor, and Angela Tempest, spinster, for the first, second, and third time of asking." *

They were to be married early in the day, under the rowan tree, as Angela had wished; and then he was to mount his bride on one of the broad-backed hill ponies, and bear her away with him to his home over the hills. It was to be like a page out of some old-world romance, but infinitely more beautiful, because it was real. Nothing sordid or mercenary! nothing of the turmoil of the outside world, was to be allowed to smirch the whiteness of that day.

Circumstances had made Jock curiously unworldly in some respects. When Angela had told him, as they had said good-bye for the last time that evening, that she had not a wedding gown, no wreath or veil, not even a sprig of orange-blossom, he had looked at her with that expression of concentrated intensity which made his eyes so very blue.

"Ought I to have given you these things?" he had asked anxiously. "I don't like veils; I want to see your face all the time."

* In the Scotch church, banns can be proclaimed for the first, second, and third time, in one proclamation.

Angela had smiled.

"A bridegroom is allowed to give his bride a bouquet. It generally smells dreadfully strong of orange-blossom, and I don't like orange-blossom; so I'm glad you can't give me one."

But Jock's brow had cleared.

"I can give you something instead of the orange-blossom. You must look out for it the very first thing in the morning. Remember, won't you?"

"Where?" she had asked.

"On your window-sill," he had answered.

As he lay on the heather, under the star-lit sky, with the faithful deerhound's muzzle resting against his knee, Jock had been going over, bit by bit, the twenty-six years of his young life, taking the measure of what was past, making his vows for what was to come. It had been a good life; but he reviewed it, as it passed before his mental vision, with the dispassionate honesty which was the integral backbone of his character—reviewed its failures and its victories, where he had stumbled, where he had buckled on his armour; there, where a lurking devil had lain in wait to tempt him; there where a helping hand had been stretched out to save.

And a great peace seemed to fall upon his spirit. The moon had risen, a yellow harvest-moon, and flooded the hills in lambent light; only where the corries scored the rocky sides of the glen the shadows lay black, like patches of dark velvet.

The hound moved. Dileas knew that it was not his master's custom to sleep out on the heather. He wished to show his sympathy, and the fact that he was aware that something unusual was happening.

Jock laid his hand on the dog's head.

"You understand, old boy, don't you?" he said.

He roused himself. The moonlight made the scene almost as bright as day, and he looked round, and then above, to where, clear cut as a cameo, against the sky, a solitary cairn stood out in bold relief.

He rose and stretched his arms—the pressure of his pillowed head had cramped them—and then he started to climb the steep hillside.

It was a stiff climb, but he never paused or slackened his pace. He was too true a Highlander not to know how to breast his native hills, and he did not stop to draw breath until he stood in the shadow of the cairn.

He knew it well. It marked the spot from where many a beacon-fire had sent its flash of warning far and wide to gather the clansmen to rally round their chief in days of old.

Jock stood, silently looking down at the moonlit beauty and grandeur of the scene. These lands were the lands which his forefathers had held and fought for, shed their blood for, suffered exile for, clung to through generations of war and peace, and on him lay the burden and the right to uphold the honour of the old name.

"It would break my heart to give it up! I cannot!"

The bitter cry was wrung from his lips. He stood with drooped head, for he could not bear to look at the loveliness stretched out before him. The thought of a stranger's rule was agony. Love of the soil, so deeply rooted in the Celtic nature, had twined its tendrils like bands of steel about his heart. He had been bred and born and nurtured on these lands; they were part of his very life; the muscles and sinews of his strength owed to them their being.

Dileas thrust his nose into his hand.

"Yes, it's time you woke me up," said Jock. "We

came to find something. I have not much to give her, but she shall have that."

He began to walk in a circle round the cairn, widening his circle at each round; then he retraced his steps, and suddenly brought himself up with an exclamation. The moonlight threw a misty sheen on the heather, whitening it like silver, and he had almost walked over the thing he was in search of. He had known that it must be there, if he could only find it; there was always a plant of white heather in that particular spot. He drew his dirk and, stooping, cut the sprigs carefully, choosing only the best.

"I can't arrange it; but she will know what to do," he said to himself, as he twisted a fibry piece of stalk round the stems of the bunch. He made a loop, so that it could hang from his finger, and not be crushed by his hand; and then he took his way down the hill again, swinging lightly over the ground, until he came to the banks of the stream below. At one place, where the water had sapped into the spongy moss, scrubby clumps of bog-myrtle grew in scattered patches. He drew his dirk again, and a sweet spicy scent rose on the night-air as his sharp blade cut into the tough stems. He gathered some wet moss, and wrapped the green shoots he had cut in it, for the roid would fade quicker than the heather; and then he went on his way again, very quietly and noiselessly now, for immediately above him on the bank was Sheila's cottage, and it was to a little window which he saw open, although the dimity curtain was pulled across it, that he must make his way, without disturbing the sleeper within.

It was close upon midnight; in another few hours the dawn would be glimmering in the east—the dawn of his wedding-day.

He was light of foot, even for a Highlander who has trod the heather all his life, and he made no more sound as he mounted the bank than did the grey shadow which followed at his heels. When he drew quite near, he hesitated and made a wider circuit, for the moonlight was strong, and the whitewashed cottage lay bathed in it, all except the bit of wall from which the window with the dimity curtain projected.

There a deep shadow fell, and into the shadow he crept; and stretching out his arm he laid his bridal gift, the only offering he had to give to his love, upon the ledge of her window-sill. He stepped back and stood motionless in the shadow. The woman he loved was sleeping under that humble roof close by; and he had kept his vigil on the lone hill-side. He took off his bonnet and raised his face to the moonlit sky.

"Help me to be worthy of her. Keep my heart clean and my hands strong. And if ever I fail in my trust, deal with me as I deserve."

That was Jock's prayer on the eve of his wedding-day. And as he walked back across the hill to the old farmhouse which had been his home for three lonely years, his heart was singing, for before another sun would rise and set, it would be lonely for him no longer.

CHAPTER XII

ANGELA was married under the rowan tree as she had wished to be married; and Flossie, standing a few paces behind her, for it was his duty to guard her to the last, owned to himself that nothing could have been more reverently beautiful, with the reverence of its own simplicity, than that hill-side ceremony.

Angela's white frock was relieved by no ornaments; but she wore her lover's bridal gift, and she had twisted a tiny little wreath of it into her dark hair.

Flossie thought he had never seen anything so tender and sweet as the radiance of happiness which shone in her eyes as she stood with her hand clasped in that of the man to whom she was plighting her troth.

Jock looked what he was that day. And he carried himself with a dignity which won for him the respect and admiration of that solitary wedding guest. For there was no bridal party, no following to carp or criticise, to admire or envy. There was no one but Flossie and the faithful Sheila, who stood behind her master; old Donald in the background, holding the rein of the hill pony which was to bear his chief's bride away on her homeward journey, remained bare-headed throughout, muttering Gaelic blessings which sounded like incantations from the spirits of another world.

Behind the grey stone altar the old minister, in his flowing black gown, struck a grave note of dramatic solemnity. His fine head with its wealth of silvery hair was framed against the drooping boughs of the rowan tree; and in his deep-set eyes shone a light of paternal love as they rested on the face of the young bridegroom. He had known him as a helpless infant held up in his father's arms to receive the sign of the cross; he had known him as a child; he had known him through youth to manhood; and he loved him as he would have loved his own son.

He closed the Bible and raised his arms in the final benediction, pouring out his blessing with a fervent sincerity which was wrung from the depths of his soul; and for some moments after he had ceased to speak, his lips continued to murmur an inward prayer over the heads of the two kneeling before him, whom he had made man and wife.

Slowly he dropped his outstretched arms, but Jock did not move. His eyes were riveted, not on Angela's face, but on the gold band which shone on the finger of the hand he held in his. Mr. MacPherson waited; then he stooped and whispered something in an undertone, and Jock rose, and still holding that precious hand in his, he led her along the green track, that wended its way like an emerald ribbon through the carpet of heather to the door of Sheila's cottage.

Sheila was standing just inside, and curtsied low to her master and his bride.

"It is the many years of happiness that I am wishing whatever," she said with shining eyes, and murmured something in Gaelic which Jock understood but which Angela did not.

Then Mr. MacPherson came in, and Flossie. Angela

went up to the old minister and his kind eyes smiled into hers.

"Is that all we have to do?" she asked. "Is it really true that we are married?"

"Yes, it will be true," he answered. His voice had the sweetly musical tone of the educated Highlander. He bowed his silvery head, with a beautiful old-world courtesy which she thought perfect. "You are our lady now—the wife of our chief."

She looked at Jock; and he kissed her, gently and reverently, before them all, and then she knew that it was true.

For a few moments she was silent, her eyes dim with tears, her heart too full for words; and then she turned and saw Flossie standing close behind her, and she threw her arms impulsively round his neck.

"I don't care whether you like it or not," she half-sobbed—"I must kiss you, Flossie. I can't help it."

Flossie winced; he was being sorely tried, but he bore himself bravely. He gently disengaged himself, and, going over to the fireplace, stood with his back to her, his arm resting on the mantelshelf. He could not speak—it was no use trying; and Angela found that she was in the little kitchen alone with him, for Mr. MacPherson and Sheila had slipped out unobserved, and Jock had whispered to her that he would go and see if Donald had saddled the pony right, and she had smiled her gratitude to him for understanding so well.

Flossie did not look round. She put her hand into his, in the way she had been used to do when, as a child, she had come to him with her joys and sorrows, and she spoke to him out of the depths of the love which was flooding her senses with a new-born light of

understanding. She told him what he had been to her; what she might have been, but for him.

"No one can take your place—no one," she said at the end. "It will always be there for you—just the same. It is quite different to any other love that can come into my life, because it has helped to make what the other will be—I mean what I hope it will be."

"Thank you, dear," said Flossie huskily. "You've been a good child. I've tried to bring you up to know your world. I didn't blindfold you."

There was a long silence, which Angela herself broke at last.

"How bare the little kitchen looks!" she said, glancing round. "The cottage is to be shut up. Sheila is going to take care of us. She will go one way, and we will go another, but she will arrive first. We are not to arrive until the end of the day, although it is only a few miles across the hills." Flossie did not respond; but she continued, trying to speak lightly, to appeal to something in him which would break the strain. "The journey is to be our honeymoon. Quite patriarchal, and different to any honeymoon that has ever been before. It will be like the wanderings of the Children of Israel looking for the Promised Land. I am to wander on the back of a pony, and Jock is to lead it."

Flossie dropped his arm from the mantelshelf and turned round. His voice had recovered its usual tone of easy lightness when he spoke.

"I hope you'll find your belongings all right. They were to be sent by the road. Are you sure that you have everything that you want?"

"Quite sure," answered Angela. "What a good thing it was that Antoinette ran away, wasn't it? She would have been such a nuisance."

Flossie gave a short laugh.

"The Fates have certainly combined to allow you to carry out your fancy for a romantic wedding, my dear," he said. "This scarlet-fever scare has helped to isolate you pretty successfully.—Well——!" It was drawing near the time to face the inevitable parting, and he must not throw a cloud on what ought to be the happiest day of her life. He took both her hands in his, and looked at her with an expression on his face which would have been a revelation, even to those who knew him best. "God bless you, dear!" he said gravely. "You have chosen your husband: be faithful to him." Then he dropped her hands quickly, and moved to the door. She heard him talking to Sheila outside, and he put his head in again and called in a brisk, authoritative voice: "Madam! Your palfrey, or whatever you call this animal out here, is saddled and bridled—and provisioned for a siege, by the look of it. It ought to have been a camel to carry out your 'Promised Land' idea of a honeymoon."

Angela came to the door.

"Where did that beautiful tea-basket come from?" she said. "I thought we were to carry our provisions for the day tied up in a bundle. I'm sure the Children of Israel carried everything in bundles."

"That's my wedding present," said Flossie, patting the basket. "It may not look Israelitish, but it's got something a deal more appetising inside it than manna, as you'll find by lunch time, after a little wandering in search of the Promised Land."

Jock was talking to Donald, and Flossie, without giving Angela time to express her thanks for the tea-basket, called to him peremptorily:

"Look here, my good man! Just begin to use your

authority with this young woman whom you have taken to yourself, with, allow me to remark, an extraordinary lack of the national caution which a canny Scot is supposed to possess. Tell her to go and take that wreath off her head, and put on a hat. I hope it's a shady one," he added, "for it's going to be a blazing hot day, although we have jumped into September."

"You are in a great hurry to get rid of me," pouted Angela.

"I have to catch a train," retorted Flossie.

Angela vanished inside the cottage, and reappeared after a few minutes' absence with her hat on, and carrying a cardboard box tied up with a piece of string. Her hat was wide and shady, and it had a blue ribbon twisted round the crown, and the ends fell over the edge of the brim.

She shook her head at Jock, who was watching her from the other side of the pony's broad back; and the blue ends fluttered and she saw the light which leapt up into his eyes.

"You recognise it, don't you? The very same blue ribbon," she said. She held out the box to Flossie. "Tie that on very carefully. Would you like to guess what's inside it? Look at the label."

Flossie read out the name of a well-known boot-shop.

"What's inside?" he said. "Not boots, if I know anything of woman's ways. Curling tongs, or a powder-puff?" He wagged his head solemnly at Jock. "O you poor innocent! what shocks you'll get, once you begin to find her out."

But Angela only laughed, and shook the boot-box at him.

"It's my wedding wreath," she said. "If we meet

any inquisitive wayfarers in our wanderings, and they look askance at me, I shall open my box. Or"—she blushed and held out her finger—"perhaps that would be more convincing. Isn't it a beautiful ring? So big and plump and shiny."

"It ought to have been through your nose," said Flossie, "if you're going to play at Biblical history. That's where Rebekah had hers clipped on by that marauding old scoundrel of Abraham's who was sent to steal a bride for Isaac. Now then, my dear——!" He took out his watch. "Good gracious! I shall have to run all the way back if I'm to catch my train." He glanced grudgingly at Jock. "Who's to mount her? You or I?"

Angela flashed a look which Jock interpreted aright, and said quickly:

"Why, you, of course, Flossie."

"All right. You haven't far to go. Now then!" And he lifted her into the saddle.

The incident gave him a last twinge of pain. He had mounted her so often; they had had many a good hunt together.

"What a broad back!" said Angela. "I couldn't fall off, if I tried." She threw the bridle over Jock's arm. "I'm going to sit still and do nothing, and you are to lead—always." Her voice dropped on the last word.

The final good-bye had been said. Jock's fingers still tingled from the grip of Flossie's parting handshake, and his farewell words rang in his ears:

"Take care of her. If you don't—by the Lord, I'll slay you with my own hand!"

On the brow of the hill, where he had paused once before, Flossie stopped and looked back. They were

moving slowly down the side of the glen; Jock with the bridle over one arm, the other thrown across the pony and his hand resting on the saddle, and Dileas following.

That was the picture which Flossie carried away with him; and it remained ever in his memory—the figures a little faint and luminous, not from distance, but because the eyes which saw them were dimmed with tears.

CHAPTER XIII

DOWN the glen path, to where the brown, peat-stained water of the hill stream widened out into a shallow bed of pebbly gravel, the little cavalcade wended its way. There were stepping-stones to cross the stream by, slabs of rock which made a natural causeway from bank to bank, and Flora MacDonald, the little broad-backed pony, was sure-footed as a mountain goat.

"But she might make a mistake," said Jock; and so it was safer that he should put his arm round Angela's waist and hold her firmly; and going up the steep side of the hill opposite there was always the chance that she might slip back in the saddle, and that would have been very uncomfortable, so it was better that the arm should remain where it was.

"It's like sitting in a rocking-chair," said Angela—"a rocking-chair with a very funny back," she added, laughing. "How strong you are! You move so steadily, and we are going up a place like the side of a house, and you are not even breathing one scrap quicker."

"I'm accustomed to it," said Jock. "I have done it all my life."

"Climbed hills with your arm round a girl's waist? O Jock, what an admission!" And he looked up at her and laughed.

It pleased her to see how well he was beginning to understand her. How the tears had brimmed up to her eyes, she remembered, when she had seen that first smile flash across his face and transfigure it to positive beauty. Now he responded; caught the reflection of her gaiety and the sparkle of her humour.

"He has been starved for want of love," she would tell herself. "He is only just beginning to know what happiness is."

And so they climbed the hill together—not too quickly, for there was no need to hurry; and Angela would make Jock turn Flora MacDonald sideways, wherever a strip of level ground gave footing; and they would pause for some minutes and look down into the valley they had left.

"I'm so glad you chose to be married in this kind of way," said Jock. It was the last halt before breasting the topmost ridge of the hill, and he was standing at her side.

"I could not have been married in a more beautiful way," she answered.

"But most people would have liked to have had all their friends round them, and—a show, and pretty frocks, and things like that," said Jock. "I should never have dared to suggest that we should be married like this myself. It was your wish. And it's always the woman that chooses these things, isn't it?"

"Yes, it was all my doing," she answered. "But, you see, there was no one to be considered. That made a difference. If you have crowds of relations who want a fuss, you have to humour them. I had only Flossie to think of, and he was angelic, wasn't he? So were you," she added. "I mean about Flossie. He hated giving me up. It would not have mattered who it

was to; and you let him do things for me, and did not interfere. It was sweet of you not to mind."

"But I did mind," said Jock. "That time before I knew you—cared, when I used to come over the hill to carry you, and he never let you out of sight or hearing for a moment, just didn't I care! I had to go away often; I couldn't stand it."

"But you were very good up to the last. You let him mount me; that pleased him so much."

"I knew it was the last," said Jock.

"And we had no inquisitive newspaper people and photographers and staring crowds, had we?" continued Angela.

"Is that what happens?" said Jock. "I don't know much about weddings."

"I don't suppose you ever read society papers, do you?"

"No, never," he answered. An anxious look crossed his face. "Of course I'll get any papers you want. You'll miss things like that. I get in a panic sometimes, and wonder if you realise how isolated we are up here. I've dropped out of everything."

"How heavenly!" murmured Angela.

They continued their way. A few more turns of the zigzag path, and then the summit would be reached.

"Jock, I'm so excited," exclaimed Angela. "I wish my neck were longer, so that I should get my first glimpse of the Promised Land a second sooner than you. But of course you know what it's like—I forgot that."

"I am as excited as you are," said Jock. "And I'm very anxious. You may not like what you see."

But he need not have been afraid.

A minute later with both hands pressing hard on

his shoulder, she was leaning over him, her eyes sparkling, and the words tumbling out of her mouth so fast that she could not frame them coherently.

"O Jock! why did you not tell me it was so lovely, so perfectly—— I don't know what to say. It is not a bit like Sheila's glen. That is so wild and rocky, it might be gloomy sometimes. But this! Isn't it beautiful, and peaceful, and——? Is that the loch? And there are trees! They grow right down to the water's edge."

Jock bent back his head against her arm.

"Are you really pleased?"

"Pleased!" She gave his shoulder a shake. Then she dropped her voice. "The Burying Island! Where is that? Not that I'm ready for it yet."

"Do you see where the loch takes a bend?" said Jock, pointing. "It's just round the corner from there. I'll row you up some day. You can't see it, even from the house."

"I'm glad of that," said Angela. "It might be depressing always to be reminded of your burying-place every time you looked out of the window." She waved her hand from side to side. "It really is like the Promised Land, overflowing with milk and honey. Aren't those dear little yellow squares, cornfields? And I see cows grazing on the green patches by the side of the lock."

"You must call it loch. You are a Highlander now," corrected Jock.

A loose end of lace brushed his cheek, and he smoothed it back, the pride of possession beginning to dawn upon him with a quick throb.

But she was gazing down at the Promised Land.

"Is that all your farm? And do you cut the corn and do everything yourself?"

"Yes. It will soon be time to begin our harvest, and then you will see!"

"I will work too," she exclaimed. "If you're a working man, I'm a working man's wife."

"It's pretty hard work," he answered. "You may sit amongst the stooks and look on."

"Stooks! What are stooks? Jock, will I ever come to the end of your funny Scotch words?"

"Stooks are the bundles of corn after they're cut and tied up," he explained.

"And where's the clachan? Oh, I see! Where that kind of blue mist hangs."

"That's the peat smoke. It hangs like that on a still day. I'm so glad you've seen the glen the first time on a day like this. It—does look pretty."

She bent her head.

"You have often been very lonely there, haven't you?"

"Yes," he answered simply—"very lonely."

She bent lower.

"But now, when you feel sad or unhappy about things, I will be able to comfort you. It will be quite different now, won't it?"

The corners of his mouth quivered.

"So long as I have you—nothing else matters." And there was silence for the space of time that twenty heartbeats could throb in unison.

Flora twitched at her bridle and swished her long tail impatiently. The flies were annoying her.

"Jock dear! I'm dreadfully hungry," said Angela.

"Are you?" he exclaimed remorsefully, and looked at his watch. "Why, it's past two o'clock! Lower down there's a spring, and a place where we can lunch."

"I hope it's a shady place," said Angela. "It's ever

so much hotter on this side of the hill than it is on the other."

"This is the sunniest glen in the Highlands," answered Jock. He brought his hand down on Flora's shaggy quarters. "Come up, old girl," he said; and Flora moved forward. A few more turns of the path and he led her round the corner of a great rock which jutted out from the hill-side. "Here is our dining-room! All in the shade; a carpet of blue-bells for your feet, and the spring bubbles up by that big grey stone. I've passed this place many a time; I little thought I should eat my wedding breakfast here."

He lifted her from Flora's back, and the brown basket was unstrapped, and a tartan plaid that had been rolled up on the saddle was shaken out and spread on the soft turf for her to sit on.

"I don't think the ground is damp," he said, "but it might feel chilly."

Angela picked up a fold of the plaid and held it against his kilt.

"It's the same," she said.

"You don't expect I'd let you sit on any tartan except my own," he answered in astonishment. He threw an end of the plaid over her shoulder. "There! You're christened. A true Highlander! That used to be my regimental plaid. It's yours now."

She looked up at him and smiled, and rubbed her cheek against the tartan.

"I like the feel of it," she said. "And oh, Jock dear, the Highland air does make you hungry. Have you got the last strap of that basket undone? Do open it quick and let us see what is inside."

There was everything inside which the most epicurean bride and bridegroom could possibly have desired for

their honeymoon lunch. Jock did all the unpacking and laying out of the table, and was very much in earnest over it.

"I am accustomed to waiting on myself," he said, when Angela remarked on his neatness. "But I shall have to be more particular now that I have you."

"You don't want much training," she answered. "Flossie has been very extravagant! I wonder how he managed to get all these delicious things. The Trojan never cooked them, I'm sure!" She peeped into the basket. "And these bottles!—what can be inside them? They are for you. He knows I don't like any kind of drinks. Do you think the water in that spring will be nice and cool? I'm so thirsty."

"It's always cool. It's like ice on the hottest day in summer," said Jock. And he dipped a tumbler in the cup-like basin of the spring, and brought it to her with the misty vapour rimming the edge, and laid it beside her plate.

They spent a long time over their wedding lunch. On that never-to-be-forgotten day of days the hours were so precious that each one must be lived to the full, and not the fragment of a moment slurred over or hurried.

"Jock, you have not even looked at the labels of these tempting bottles that Flossie has provided for you so carefully," said Angela.

"Whiskey's good enough for me," said Jock. "And that spring water was nice and cool, wasn't it? Shall I fetch you some to dabble your fingers in?"

She said "Yes." And he brought her the water in a dish which he found in the brown basket amongst the tea things, and he dried her fingers for her—very carefully; and then, lying down on the grass, he pillowed his head on his arms.

"We won't tidy up yet," he said. "There's nothing to hurry for."

No, there was nothing to hurry for. Flora, with the reins twisted loosely round the pommel of her saddle, was cropping the sweet hill grass a few yards away. She would come at Jock's call, and the Promised Land, in the valley below, was within reach whenever they chose to go down and take possession of it.

"Don't you want to smoke?" said Angela. "Do you know, I don't remember ever to have seen you with a cigarette in your mouth."

"Too expensive a luxury for a working man," said Jock. "I smoke a pipe when I want to smoke."

"How funny it will be finding out our likes and dislikes, and the things that we agree about and disagree about," said Angela. She was looking down at him, her chin in her hand and her elbow on her knee. She shook her head meditatively. "I shall be much more difficult to find out than you. I shall always be giving you shocks and surprises. You are so single-minded. A thing is either right or wrong. Women are more subtle in the way they get what they want than men. When I give you shocks, you will look at me with that terribly intense look in your eyes which makes them so blue, and I shall feel very small and hate myself!" She laughed at his expression. "Yes, I often hate myself," she said. "I often hate myself so much that I should like to go and drown myself."

"Angela!" protested Jock.

"Angela?" she echoed. "You so seldom call me by my name."

"It's because I have all kinds of names for you that I never speak out loud," said Jock. He moved his head nearer to her, and his bonnet fell off, and she picked it up.

She laid it on her lap and gave it a pat.

"It likes lying there," she said, watching him. "Aren't you sorry your head isn't inside it now?"

Jock looked at his blue bonnet longingly; and then:

"You're an old goose," she said a few minutes later. "I believe you've wanted to lay your head there all along! Haven't you?"

Jock was gazing up at her, an adoring awe on his face.

"If you could only see how you look from where I see you!" he said. "The brim of your hat makes a kind of——"

"Hal-loo!" suggested Angela.

But he was too much in earnest to be put off with flippancy.

"Yes, it's the kind of pale gold that halos are made of. And your hair looks so soft against it. And a bit of blue ribbon is hanging over the edge, just the same colour as the sky, as if——"

"As if a cherub had chipped off a bit and tumbled it down on the top of me," laughed Angela. "Jock, what a ridiculous creature you are! You ought to be a poet."

"And there's a piece of white heather sticking in your hair," continued Jock, "just behind your ear. Oh, don't take it off!"

He tried to catch her hand, but Angela found the piece of white heather.

"It clings so firmly with its little spikes," she said. "It was such a pretty idea of yours to lay my wedding wreath on my window-sill. It was the first thing that greeted me in the morning when I looked out."

She disentangled the bit of heather, and bending over him, she fastened it into his coat. Then she did what she had never done before, for during the days of their

brief engagement she had lavished few caresses upon him. She laid her hand on his hair and smoothed it back with a tender touch. It was her left hand, and he could feel the pressure of her wedding ring against his brow. He shut his eyes; he could hardly bear the thrill of ecstasy which trembled through every nerve.

When he opened his eyes again and looked up, she was still bending over him. A luminous light seemed to float above and around her, wrapping him too in its radiance.

He stretched up his arms and drew her face down to his.

"Is it—can it really be true that you are—my wife?" he whispered.

"I hope so," she whispered back.

"Are you happy?" he murmured. "Kiss me, and tell me that you are happy."

"Very happy," and she kissed him—soft kisses which fell like scented rose-leaves when shaken by the summer's breeze.

He could not see her face now; he had drawn her so near.

"Say it again—tell me that you are happy."

"I am happy—very happy." She breathed the words low in his ear. "I want to hold the time—it goes so quickly. I am living at my heart's door—you are my heart's door."

Her lips parted, and rested with a fluttering sigh on his closed eyelids.

CHAPTER XIV

THE last halting-place was at the head of the glen, where the stream, which they had crossed early in the day, poured its brown waters into the deeper depths of the loch.

They were so near home that Jock suggested that if Angela wished, they could push on and be under their own roof in time for tea; but, like a child who is keeping its greatest treat to the last, she said "No"; that they would spend the whole day out-of-doors; and it was only when the sun had begun to dip towards the hill-tops that they turned their faces homewards.

"How long will it take? I am more excited than ever now. I can hardly bear to look," said Angela, as he lifted her into the saddle for the last time. "Dileas is getting excited too." She stooped to caress the old hound, who had brushed up to her stirrup. "He has been so solemn all day and so dreadfully proper. Do you think he's jealous, Jock?"

"No; he knows all about it," answered Jock, pulling the dog's ear. "It was I who used to be jealous, of him. Do you remember when you kissed his nose that time for finding you? After that I was always telling him what a lucky dog he was."

A few minutes later they struck into the road which wound along by the side of the loch.

"A real road!" said Angela; "and so smooth and yellow, like a gold thread. Where does it come from? And where does it go to?"

"It branches off from the main road miles away, and it goes no farther than the clachan. It loses itself in the loch," answered Jock. "We are never bothered with strangers here."

"What a blessing!" murmured Angela.

It was a typically lovely bit of Highland loch-scenery which they were traversing. The road ran close to the water's edge, and on the right the ground rose in a gentle slope, and was thickly wooded with a natural growth of oak and birch. As the glen widened, the hill-tops came into view above the fringe of green; and stray gleams of sunshine, peeping through the overhanging branches, laid shafts of light on the emerald carpet of close turf which bordered the sandy margin of the road. Tumbled masses of grey rock were scattered thickly amongst the green; bramble and woodbine, showing the first faint tinge of autumn, dipped to the water's rim; and over the mirrored surface of the loch the shadows were beginning to deepen into inky pools of depth and mystery.

They left the trees behind them, and, turning the corner of a grassy knoll, they came upon a cobble-stoned jetty which ran out into the water. Alongside of it was a boat-house, brown and weather-stained; and a picturesque litter of boat-gear and fallen timber lay scattered on the shingle round it. A few paces farther on Flora stopped of her own accord before a white gate.

"Oh!" was all that Angela found breath to exclaim, and she caught hold of Jock's shoulder. A couple of quaint round pillars, whitewashed, and with odd little tiled roofs like pepper pots, supported either side of the

gate. Just inside the gate two old holly trees, bulging below, and then narrowing upwards, joined their tapering heads in an arch; and in and out of the dark glistening leaves, flaming wreaths of tropæolum twined their scarlet tendrils. "Holly!—the badge!" said Angela. "You always pass under it, every time you go in and out. How pretty!" She stretched forward. "And a garden! I smell such sweet things. Oh, Jock, help me down, quick, so that I can get inside the gate."

"Welcome—to your home," he said, as he lifted her from the saddle.

She had only time to give him a fleeting kiss as she slipped through his arms, and then found, to her consternation, that a strange man was standing by Flora's head, holding his cap in his hand and making her a very polite bow.

"I must introduce you to Hamish," said Jock, and added in an undertone, "He's my—kind of odd-man. He's come to take the pony. You won't understand his Gaelic welcome, but—just shake hands with him and he'll be so pleased."

Hamish spoke in Gaelic and Angela spoke in English, but they understood each other perfectly; and the poetic soul of the Highlander was fired with admiration, and he went off with his hand on Flora's neck muttering blessings on the beautiful head of his chief's young bride.

"Now," said Angela, as Jock opened the gate—"now I think you had better hold my hand, because I shall want to run about everywhere, and then I'll tumble into something and sprain my ankle all over again; and I've no more use for sprained ankles, have I?"

"Never fear! I won't let you out of my reach," said Jock; and he took the little hand in his, and they passed

under the holly arch, with its wreaths of flaming scarlet making a banner of glory above their heads, and walked up the pathway.

It was a beautifully smooth pathway, and sloped gently upwards and was bordered by neatly clipped box; a luxurious wealth of old-fashioned flowers grew on either side of it; and the mellow light of the setting sun bathed all in a glow of colour.

Half-way up the pathway Angela stooped, and looked up at the house which was to be her home.

It was a square, whitewashed house, with a window on each side of the door, and two smaller windows blinked from under the overhanging eaves above. At either corner were rounded gables with the same kind of odd, pepper-pot tiled roofs as topped the pillars by the gate. Jessamine and honeysuckle twined thickly together over the porch; and the windows stood wide open, as did the door, in hospitable welcome.

"It's the darlingest house, and the darlingest garden, and—and you are the darlingest bit of it all," said Angela, squeezing Jock's fingers hard. "But oh, Jock! I am finding out every minute more and more what a dark horse you are. How deep you have been! You never gave me the least idea that it was like this." She gazed up at the house. Its old-fashioned simplicity fascinated her. "Jock, are all Highland farmhouses as nice as this?"

Jock was watching her face. Her appreciation was so sweet to him.

"It's not an ordinary farmhouse," he explained. "It has always been used as a kind of dower-house. An old aunt of my father's lived here for many years. She was a wonderful old lady. She had all the history of the family and the clan at her finger-ends, and she was

a great authority on everything Highland. People used to come from far to see her. You would be surprised if I were to tell you the names of the celebrities who have walked up this garden path." He looked back over his shoulder. "Most gracious Royalty has passed under that holly arch."

Angela turned and looked back also.

"And I expect most gracious Royalty felt very proud of being a little bit Highland. I am trying to be a Highlander as quick as ever I can. Come!" She pulled him with her. "Let us go in. I must not use up all my admiration before I get into the house."

On the doorstep a surprise greeted them. Sheila stepped out, and stretching up her arms to their highest, she broke a large oatcake over Angela, and a deluge of crumbs descended on the bride's head.

"Oh! what is that?" cried Angela. "Is the ceiling tumbling down?"

Jock laughed.

"Sheila's broken an oatcake over your head for luck. It's an old custom. You see what Scotch brides have to undergo! It broke beautifully," he said, turning to address Sheila.

But Sheila had vanished as mysteriously as she had appeared, and Angela stepped across the threshold of her new home.

There was no vestibule, no strange doors to open. She found herself standing in the middle of a square hall, the walls of which were almost covered with the miscellaneous collection of things which stamp a man's tastes on his surroundings. A row of stags' heads made a kind of frieze below the line of the ceiling; Jock's guns and fishing-rods were arranged in their stands, facing the door; and a half-length portrait of hi

father hung over the mantelpiece. A skin rug lay on the stone flags in front of the old-fashioned fireplace, which Dileas took possession of as his right.

In the middle of the hall a round table was set, ready for a meal; the table-cloth was of the finest damask, and the silver was of a beautiful pattern, old and rare. In the centre stood a bowl of blue-bells and heather. The table was [illegible] for two; and two high-backed chairs, with carved [illegible] were drawn up to it, facing each other.

Jock looked anxiously at Angela.

"This is [illegible]ning-room," he said. "I made it [illegible] to be a kind of parlour here, and [illegible] all away. The stair goes up behind [illegible] and there's a door leads into the kitchen [illegible], to save Sheila the trouble of carrying things and answering bells."

Angela slipped away from him and made a tour of the hall by herself, looking behind the screen and through the door into the kitchen and into all the corners, even up the wide chimney, and then came back to him.

"I feel as though I ought to walk on tiptoe and speak in a whisper," she said. "It's like playing at a game of exploring when you don't know what's going to jump out at you from some hiding-place. Where does that other door lead to?"

"That's my sitting-room—my own particular den," said Jock. "But—you haven't said what you think about this. Are you disappointed?"

"Hush!—don't ask me questions just now," she answered. "My head is so full of new things I can't speak properly. But—I'm enjoying myself more than I ever did in all my life before."

Jock opened the door of his den and allowed her to pass in in front of him.

She stood for a moment, and then turned herself round slowly.

"You Sybarite!" she exclaimed.

It was a delightful room, although it was essentially a man's room; everything in it was meant for use. The colouring was soft and mellow because there was nothing new in it. The lower part of the walls were lined with well-filled book-shelves, and some good sporting prints and engravings filled the spaces above. The furniture was comfortable, and bore the stamp of an old-world, refined simplicity.

"Books!" said Angela, walking across to the shelves. "I'm so glad you love books. So do I. I see heaps of old friends. How did you collect such a lot?"

"I brought most of them with me from Glenmoira," answered Jock. "I've managed to add a few new ones now and again. I get through a lot of reading in the winter nights." He came over and stood beside her. "The days are very short up here in the winter. There will be lots of spare time on your hands. I'm afraid you'll find that out."

Angela shook her head.

"Don't you fuss over the idea that I shall be dull, even if it's dark for six months out of the twelve. I'm never dull. I never allow myself to be dull!" She took his arm, and leading him over to the window made him stand beside her, facing the room. "You call this your den," she said. "You don't expect you are going to keep me out of it, do you? Where is my corner to be?"

"I hoped you would have found that out for yourself," said Jock. "There! That little sofa by the fireplace. It wasn't in the room before. I got it for—you. I thought it would be better than a chair, in case your

ankle bothered you. You might want to rest it sometimes."

"How sweet of you to think of that," she said, touched by his thought for her. "It's a dear little sofa; and what a beautiful cushion! So big and downy, and such a lovely shade of green." She crossed the room and looked at the cushion more closely. "It's all embroidered. Some one has worked the badge on it—a wreath of holly leaves. How pretty!"

Jock looked very gratified.

"Christina worked it. She gave me that cushion. I'm so glad you think it's pretty."

Angela dropped the cushion and wheeled round.

"Whose Christina?" she demanded.

"Oh! she's just Christina," answered Jock. "She gave it to me yesterday. You'll love Christina," he added.

"Christina," echoed Angela. "I never heard you mention Christina before. I thought you said you had no friends, neighbours, up here?" She took hold of the flap of his coat collar. "Jock! what girl worked you that cushion?"

"Girl!" Jock collapsed on to a chair. "Christina! A girl! She's old MacPherson's sister. She—she's about fifty!"

"Make her sixty, and I'll adore her," said Angela. She patted him on the back. "If you keep on laughing like that you'll hurt yourself; and I want to go on exploring. I haven't half finished the house. What comes next?"

"Not very much," said Jock. "It's very small. There's the kitchen behind this—you've seen that; I saw you peeping—and upstairs. The stair is very steep, and twists round and round. Shall I carry you?"

Angela laughed and ran past him, out of the room and across the hall and was up the first two steps of the stairs before he could overtake her.

"It's like a doll's staircase," she said. "It's the right size for me, but you're too big. Why, I'm up to the top already! What a funny landing, with a window like a shaving-glass in the roof! Two doors! May I open them and look in?"

Jock barred her way, and kept his hold on the handle of the door nearest to her.

"This will be your room," he said. "I'm so afraid you won't like it. It was the aunt's, and she brought her own furniture with her from Glenmoira, and it's rather big for the room."

He half-opened the door, and Angela crept in past him cautiously. She gave a gasp, and sitting down on a chair which stood conveniently near, began to laugh, and went on laughing.

"O Jock!" she murmured, "how did it ever get in? Was it dropped through the ceiling, or did it grow there? I never saw such a monstrous thing in all my life."

Almost the entire flooring space of the room was occupied by a huge four-post bed. The canopy, which was of dark oak, and from which hung richly embroidered silk curtains, was supported on carved pillars; and a crest and coat-of-arms was emblazoned on the centre panel of the head-piece.

"There is hardly any room to walk round it," continued Angela hysterically. "Jock, it's a wonder! It ought to be sent to a show! Is it a family heirloom?"

Jock was leaning against the door and gazing at his ancestral possession very seriously.

"I think the aunt considered it a kind of heirloom. She was very proud of it. I've heard my father say it took days to flit it over from Glenmoira. I've seen her often in it. She used to have kind of receptions up here. She had the second sight, you know."

"Second sight! What's that?" asked Angela.

Jock looked puzzled. "Haven't you heard of it? Well, no, perhaps not; it's peculiarly Highland, I suppose. It's a kind of extra sense. Being able to see beyond the present—to foretell what's going to happen; or to have the knowledge conveyed to you of something that is happening to some one when they are not present with you—maybe at the other end of the world."

Angela drew closer to him.

"I can almost imagine I see her sitting up under that great canopy, and telling people things," she said. "I wonder what gave her the power of second sight?"

"They say it's hereditary," answered Jock.

"Have you got it?" asked Angela, drawing still closer to him.

"I don't know," he said. "I've never tried to find out. She had it to an extraordinary extent; but then she cultivated it, and her power for healing the sick. The people in the glens up here believed in her as though she were inspired."

"How extraordinary!" murmured Angela. "I've read of such things, but I'm never quite sure if I could make myself believe them. Jock! How would you know if you had it—second sight, I mean, and the power of healing? I—I don't know whether I want you to have it. Hold my hand tight, please, if you're going to say anything creepy."

Jock held her hand very tight.

"You need not be frightened," he said. "I could never harm you, even if I had the power. She always used to say that it was quite simple. That she learnt her knowledge from studying nature, and from her faith in prayer. She was a very good woman. There was nothing creepy or uncomfortable about her." He hesitated. "It is said such things are hereditary. But I don't know that I would like it to come out in me. I should be afraid in case I did not make as good a use of it as she did."

"I wouldn't be afraid of you," said Angela. "And you remember her quite well?"

"Quite well! She was a little woman—smaller even than you."

"Even than me! What disparagement!"

She disengaged her hand, and began to make a cautious progress round the four-poster.

"If I walk very carefully, I can just keep from bumping into it. There's more space than you would imagine. And—O Jock, this little towery place, that looks like a pepper-pot from the outside, has such a duck of a dressing-table in it, with a looking-glass like a heart." She ran back to where he was still leaning against the door. "Do take that anxious expression off your face," she said. "I'm delighted—charmed. The aunt's legacies are priceless. Now what comes next? Where does that other door lead to?—that one across the landing?" And she tried to look behind his shoulder.

"That's my room," said Jock. "I hope it's tidy." And he opened the door.

The room was austerely tidy.

Angela gave a delighted scream, and pounced on

something which was sticking out of the pocket of a coat hanging on the door.

"My boot!" she exclaimed; "and I've wondered and wondered what had become of it. You snipped the laces all to ribbons. Such extravagance!"

But Jock was too quick for her. She might as well have tried to loosen an iron band as the strong fingers which closed over that little brown boot.

"I wouldn't part with it!—not for anything in the wide world," he declared. "No!" as she held up her face—"not for a dozen!"

"But, Jock, it's such a waste! The other one is quite good. It makes me feel like a one-legged woman. I shall have to throw it away."

"I don't care," said Jock. "You may do what you like with it; but I shall stick to my boot. It lives in that pocket. I like it to hang there."

A bell tinkled below.

"What's that?" asked Angela in alarm. "Not visitors?"

"It's dinner," said Jock. "We've been forgetting how late it is."

"And I haven't unpacked anything. There isn't time now. You must lend me a brush to tidy my hair."

She departed with the brush and vanished into her own room.

They found dinner waiting for them on the round table in the hall; and Jock pulled out one of the high-backed chairs for her, and then, seating himself in the one opposite, he bowed his head and said grace—a very short grace.

"He doesn't gabble. I love the way he says it," whispered Angela to herself.

He waited upon her, as he had done at lunch, and the

meal was a very simple one. When they were finished with one course, he rang a small bell which stood beside his plate, and Sheila knew what was wanted.

"Do you sweep up the crumbs at the end?" asked Angela, when the bell had tinkled for the last time.

She did not wait for an answer, but rising swiftly, she came round to his chair and, perching herself on the arm, kissed the top of his head.

"Waiters always get tips," she said. "And honeymooners are supposed to give extra good ones. That's yours! You make a perfect waiter, Jock—so nice and quiet. You walk so lightly; I think it has something to do with the swing of your kilt."

For answer he put his arm round her, and held her to him.

"Hasn't it been a perfect wedding-day?" she said, sinking her voice. "So peaceful and beautiful. Think of the poor people who have the ordinary kind of wedding. No one has done a single thing for me, except—you."

He drew her closer.

"Yes! I've had you all to myself. Nothing has come between us."

She was silent for a minute and then said:

"I think that's it. People get very near to each other when there is nothing to come between. I mean nothing sordid or mercenary, like—like money. Don't you think so?"

He did not answer, and she bent to see his face.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked.

He caught her to him, and then held her back, searching her face with a passionate entreaty of question.

"Will I be able to make you happy? I—am afraid when I think of what I have asked you to share."

"Dear," she whispered, "I love my home, every bit of it."

There was a tremble in her voice and a shining tenderness in her eyes.

"It is so little that I have to give you," he said; "and—supposing—supposing I was forced into selling the place? That always hangs over me."

"Whatever happens, I should always have you," she answered.

He leant his head against the lace folded across the bosom of her dress. The faint scent of violets clung about it. He could feel the gentle rise and fall of her breathing.

"So long as I have my strength, and hands to work for you, you'll never want—please God," he murmured.

She took the strong brown hands, which were to work for her, in her two little ones and pressed her cheek against them.

"My man," she said softly.

Later, after the dusk had fallen, they went out into the porch and stood under the honeysuckle and jessamine. In that northern land the summer nights are never quite dark, and the hill-tops showed clear against the sky, and the surface of the loch, though shrouded, was not hidden.

"I wish the moon would rise and shine on the loch, and make a silvery, shimmery path all the way up to where it's so black, under the bank," said Angela.

"It will presently," answered Jock. "We will sit and watch for it." And he went back into the hall, and brought out a couple of chairs and a cloak to wrap round her.

They sat in the scented dusk and talked—talked of

themselves, and their love, and of the wondrous happiness which this love had brought into their lives. If there were fears and shadows to come, they would meet them together. As they looked down the vista of years, they ever pictured themselves hand to hand, pulse beating to pulse, heart answering to heart.

The house was dark when they went in, with the exception of a streak of light shining from under the kitchen door; but Jock knew where to find the lamp, and striking a match, he lit it. It was a small reading lamp, and he held it up so as to throw its reflection before him.

"Come into my den," he said to Angela. "There is something I wish you to do."

He led the way into the room, holding the lamp in front of him, and, placing it on his writing-table, he went over to one of the book-shelves, and took out a large bulky volume, whose binding was worn with age. He laid it on the table, and drawing in a chair which stood near, he put his arm round Angela's waist and drew her down beside him.

"Do you know what that is?" he said, touching the book.

Angela opened it and turned over the leaves. The writing was quite unintelligible to her.

"It's a Gaelic Bible," said Jock; "it's more than a hundred years old. The family births, deaths, and marriages are entered in it."

He turned over the pages. On the fly-leaf at the beginning were lines of written names, with dates attached. Many of them were so faint and yellow, and the handwriting so cramped, as to be almost undecipherable. They were names of a race who had lived and loved; made history; printed their finger-

marks on the pages of time. And now, what did these faded signatures stand for, mute witnesses to the law of oblivion?

Angela pored over the open page.

"Isn't it pathetic, Jock?" she said, in a hushed voice. "All of them gone; and yet their names last, written here by living hands, when they were young and strong, with love in their hearts—like us. They seem to want to speak. Don't you feel that? As if they longed to tell us things—perhaps want to help us, to say 'Don't do this, and don't do that. I did it, and it was wrong.'"

Jock touched her hair caressingly as she leant against him.

"It's a pretty idea," he said, "but I'm afraid we all have to buy our own experience—it's the rule of the road."

He drew his finger down the page to a blank space.

"This is where we have to sign our names. I looked out the place the other night." He took up a pen and tried it. "Perhaps I ought to write mine first."

"Yes, you write your name first," she said.

And he wrote it, "John Murdoch Mackenzie," and added the date. Then he put the pen into her hand, and she wrote underneath his name, "Angela Tempest."

"Only Angela," he said. And she answered, "Only Angela," and then they sat with their heads very close together and read the names in whispers, whilst they waited for the ink to dry, because Jock would not blot it.

"It must look firm and distinct," he said.

At last the book was closed. They could hear Sheila moving about the house. The door into the hall

stood open, and they heard the creaking of the stair as she mounted it, and her foot-fall, light as it was, in the room above.

The stair creaked again, and she came down.

"Where do Donald and Sheila sleep?" asked Angela. "You did not show me their part of the house."

"They don't live in the house," said Jock. "Their cottage is just outside; a few yards from the back door. Donald would be miserable living in an ordinary house."

Angela sat up and listened. The proud little head was held very erect. Jock could not see her face. It was turned away from him, and the lamp-light threw only the shadow of her hair and the gleam of her white throat into relief.

There was the noise of a window being closed; a door shut; a key was turned in the lock; and then a great silence fell, and brooded over the house; and not a sound broke the stillness of the night.

He saw her raise her head higher, and she clasped and unclasped her hands, and then held them together tightly. She turned. He could see her face now.

"It's—it's very quiet," she murmured.

A quick dread surged through him, sending the blood beating to his temples. He gripped hold of the arms of his chair.

"You—you're not afraid?" he said huskily.

She did not answer. Her gaze went round the room—into the shadowy corners, to the open door. There was nothing beyond it but blank space. Her gaze came back, and rested on his face.

Still she did not speak. She sat with her head held high and looked at him—not defiantly, not as though she were afraid; her eyes met his fearlessly, question-

ingly, piercing as if through the shroud of the flesh to the soul of the man within.

He bore the look steadily, without a quiver or movement. His hands did not relax their grip; he did not put out a finger to touch her. She drew a long breath. There was a little catch at the end of it; and then, without a word, she laid her head down on his breast.

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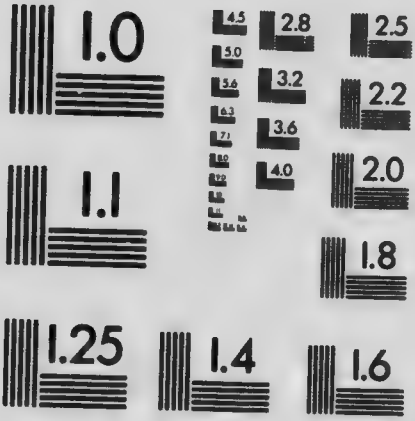

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CHAPTER XV

AND so began for these two their new life together. In the simplicity of their love and passion they did not seek to analyse; they were too happy to trace reasons or emotions; they lived for the joy of living. The filmy mist which spangled the morning green, the golden haze of sunset, the deep, dark blue of the starlit sky—these were the treasures of wealth which Nature put forth, it would seem, for them alone.

They spent all their days out-of-doors, wandering where fancy took them, Flossie's basket strapped to Flora's saddle or lying under the seat of the boat, for they were as often on the loch as on the moor.

"You must not tire your ankle," Jock would always say to Angela as they started. And if the expedition was on the hill, she was lifted on to Flora's back, and he took the bridle and—"led always."

He showed her all his favourite haunts, and every one was associated with some boyish memory of sport or adventure. There he had shot his first grouse—in that brown pool he had caught his first trout; and Angela was never tired of listening and asking questions, and he was never tired of answering.

Angela liked the days on the loch best. It was so smooth and tranquil, so infinitely restful to glide along

with hardly any perceptible sound or movement except the soft dip of the oars. She would make Jock row her in close to the banks where they were steepest, and where the rock was fringed to the water's edge with fern and trailing creeper, and where, in the crevices of the grey stone, grew countless plants of microscopic beauty and fragile loveliness. Above swept the birch's graceful foliage or the sturdier branches of the virgin oak; and through clumps of mellowing green the crimson berries of the rowan trees thrust their ripened harvest flaming to the sun.

"It's so fascinating being able to come so close to the bank in deep water and touch it," said Angela one afternoon when they were out in the boat. "You said just now that you were going to show me something. What is it?"

Jock shipped his oars, and pulling the boat along by an overhanging branch, he drew it into a break in the bank where some reeds grew tall and thick. He parted them, and Angela peered over the side of the boat.

"A nest!" she exclaimed—"a poor little deserted nest!"

"A moor-hen's nest," said Jock. "It's a kind of ancestral home. I always remember a moor-hen nesting somewhere about here. One morning this spring I remember rowing up the loch, and I looked to see and there were the eggs, and in the evening when I came back they were all hatched out and away. It's a pretty sight to see the chicks with the mother-hen. She tumbles them into the water, and then swims about with them round her, like bits of fluff."

"Does she never take them back to the nest?" asked Angela.

"No; she hides with them somewhere about the bank. She never brings them back to the nest."

Angela put her fingers into the nest, laced round with grass and withered tangle.

"All cold and deserted," she said. "Jock, we'll come and look here next spring—together. I should love to see the hen tumbling her fluffy babies into the water. You'll remember the place, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll remember," said Jock. "I know it well." He pushed out into deeper water, and rowing some way from the bank, drew in his oars and sat with them crossed, the water dripping from the blades. "There are lots of duck on this loch," he remarked. "Later on we'll have some stalks after them. You would like to come out with me, wouldn't you?"

"I shan't let you go—unless you take me with you," answered Angela.

Jock looked pleased.

"I suppose it would bore some women if a man always wanted them to take an interest in what he was doing?"

Angela pursed up her mouth.

"If it was the right man, it wouldn't bore them. Dearest!" she added, "you don't know anything about women—and I'm so glad."

"But you do like coming with me, for the love of the sport?" he said, bending forward over his oars. He took her hand and spanned the slenderness of her wrist with his finger and thumb. "It's so fragile," he said. "Are you hardy enough to be dragged about by a great strong thing like me? I may not know when you're tired. Will you always tell me?"

"Dragged about!" scoffed Angela. "I do simply nothing but sit still—and be spoilt. And I'm as

strong as—why, if you only knew what I can do, and never be a bit tired. I've hunted four days a week, and danced all night, and——" She broke off, and bit her lip.

Jock looked a little surprised.

"I suppose you stayed about a lot," he said, "and your friends mounted you?"

"Oh! I've always been fond of riding," she said hurriedly. "Flossie gave me a pony when I was six and taught me to ride, and——" She changed the subject abruptly. "Jock, you've never taken me to see the Burying Island. You promised you would. It's just round that bend in the loch, isn't it? Let us go now."

"All right," he said, and dipping his oars into the water, he turned the boat's prow towards the centre of the loch, and crossing to the other side, they rounded a wooded promontory, and came into view of a small island, lying like a green jewel in the centre of a broad, open sheet of water. At one end of it a clump of yew trees showed black and sombre, and here and there the glimmer of a white cross or head-stone stood out against the dark background.

"Would you like to land," he said, "or shall I row you round? I can go in quite near; the banks shelve off into deep water."

"I think I would rather be rowed round," answered Angela. "How pretty it is! I like to think of them all sleeping there, with the beautiful, still water on every side—no restless human voices."

"Yes, it's a lovely spot," said Jock.

Angela slid from her seat, and, dragging the cushion with her, sat down in the bottom of the boat and leant up against him.

"It makes me feel just a little—a little eerie," she said. And he let the boat drift and put his arm round her.

"Are all your ancestors buried there—the people whose names we saw in the old Bible?" she asked.

"Yes, they're all buried there. Behind that clump of yews is our particular bit; but any one in the glen—any of the clan can be buried on the island."

"What was it that you once told me about the people?—that they think that the water keeps off the evil spirits?"

"Yes. That's one of their ideas. And they will never look across to the island after dark, if they can possibly help it."

"Why?"

"Because of the lights. If a light is seen on the island, they say it means a death in the glen."

"A light! But the island's not inhabited," said Angela.

"Ah! that's where their superstition comes in," said Jock. "It's supposed to be a ghostly light—some one's death-candle. And the odd part of it is that the lights have been seen repeatedly by quite credible eye-witnesses, and invariably a death has taken place immediately afterwards. It's a queer business. I could tell you some funny stories of things that have happened."

Angela shivered.

"You don't like the subject," he said. "We won't talk about it. What shall we do now? Go back—or what?"

"Let us go on and find some place where we can land for tea," she answered. "And I am going to row. It will help to take away the creeps."

"Can you row?" he asked.

"No, not a bit," she answered. "But the sooner I begin to learn the better. Make room for me beside you, and we'll row together. You must keep time with me, because I shall be much too busy with my own oar to watch yours! Now! You needn't hold me on to the seat; I won't tumble into the water."

On their return that evening they found the post-bag, which Hamish generally brought in about seven o'clock, waiting for them; but as they were late, they did not open it until after dinner.

"Nearly everything for you," said Jock, as he unlocked the bag and gave a fat bundle of letters and enclosures into Angela's hand.

She flushed, and looked up at him.

"The secret is out," she said. "Look! That is from Lady Di! And I see Dolly's writing, and—— What will they all say?"

For some time there was nothing heard but the rustling of notepaper and the slitting open of envelopes. Now and again Angela laughed softly to herself, or some half-uttered exclamation escaped her lips. After she had finished reading her correspondence, she sat quite still for a few minutes. Jock was sitting by the open window smoking, and his head was turned away. Suddenly he heard a sound as though she had tumbled all her letters on to the floor. Two clinging arms were thrown round his neck, and soft lips pressed kisses against his cheek.

"Jock! you are the dearest dear! You are—you are such a gentleman."

His pipe was knocked out of his mouth, but he did not mind.

"You never ask questions—and you're never inquisitive—you never pry—and——" She broke off abruptly.

"My darling," he said, tenderly smoothing her hair as she bent back her head to look into his eyes, "why should I be inquisitive?"

"Oh, I don't know!" she answered. Then she laughed. "Lady Di's letter is very funny: pages of good advice. She says if I had told her in time she would have stretched a point to come to my wedding. Haven't we had an escape? And she ends by saying that she may be up north for some fishing in the spring, and that she will offer herself for a visit. The house is too small to hold any one but ourselves, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered Jock.

She laid her head down on his shoulder, and he continued to caress her hair, but something in his touch did not satisfy her.

"Jock, you are not thinking about what you are doing," she said. He did not answer, and she glanced up. "What is the matter?" she asked. "You had a letter. Is there anything wrong?"

"I had a letter from Alister," said Jock slowly.

"And you are worried about it." She tried to keep the resentment out of her voice, for she did not wish to hurt him; but an involuntary antagonism always rose up hotly within her when she saw that look come into his eyes—a tired, helpless look. "Would you like to tell me about it?—or would you rather not? Can I help you?" she added more gently.

He took Alister's letter out of his pocket, and looked at it and then at her.

"You can read it, if you like," he said. "It's not that there's anything actually wrong, but—— Of course, it's a very uncongenial life for him. He never cared much for roughing it, and——"

Angela took the letter and read it, for she saw that

he wished her to do so. Her inward comment on it was:

"He is utterly selfish. It is all about himself. Grumbles, and asking for money."

"It is hard on him, of course, even although it is his own fault," said Jock. "You see how he feels the banishment. When I think of what I have . . . of our home up here . . ."

"But would he be contented with this kind of life?' said Angela. "You and I love it because—we are you and I. But would it satisfy him?"

Jock looked out of the window, to where the outline of the hills showed faintly above the loch.

"No," he said, and there was a bitter note in his voice. "If he had Glenmoira to-day, he would sell it to-morrow. And the money would run through his fingers like water."

Angela glanced at the letter in Jock's hand.

"He doesn't say anything about—your marriage. Have you told him? Won't that make a difference? Won't it make him see that you can't be responsible for him now?"

"I have told him about my marriage," answered Jock, "but that letter must have been written before he heard of it." He sighed heavily, and his eyes wandered again to the open window. "I don't believe," he said slowly, "that even when he does hear, he will realise that my being married ought to make a difference in my responsibility towards him. It will be so hard—so desperately hard to make him understand. I gave my promise; he will expect me to keep to my word."

"Your promise to your mother, you mean?" said Angela. "You did tell me about it. But—tell me again."

"I promised that if things came to the worst, I

would consent to the breaking of the entail, and—sell Glenmoira."

The pain in his voice made her heart ache for him, but she persisted gently.

"Has Alister ever reminded you of your promise?"

"Yes," Jock admitted reluctantly. "He's my heir, you see. We can break the entail by mutual consent."

Angela took a little while to ponder over this statement; then she asked, hesitatingly:

"An entail can only be broken if the next heir gives his consent? Is that it?"

"In our case it is so," said Jock. "Glenmoira is entailed in the male line. The entail can't be broken unless the next heir is of age and gives his consent. Alister has a certain claim on me."

"I understand," said Angela.

Jock broke the silence which followed, himself, and he spoke quickly, with obvious effort.

"I said just now that Alister had a claim on me, because he is the next heir. But—if I had a son of my own, he would legally have no claim on me, and my hands would be tied so far as breaking the entail and selling the place was concerned. I could do nothing until my heir was of age. Alister, when he hears of my marriage, may try to make me keep my promise now. That is what I am afraid of."

"Entails must be very puzzling things," said Angela. When she spoke again, it was upon quite an irrelevant subject. "When are you going to begin your harvest, Jock?" she asked. "You've rather swaggered about being a working man, but I have not seen you do any work yet." She pinched his arm. "Your muscles are beginning to get quite soft."

"They're not," he answered reproachfully, rising to

her challenge. "Think of the miles I've walked beside your pony, and rowed you for hours on the loch."

Angela laughed at the success of her ruse.

"He will forget Alister and his worries if he has some work to do," she said to herself. "You promised to teach me how to harvest," she continued. "What are the funny things I am to learn to make? Stooks! Isn't it clever of me to remember that word? If I am to be a working man's wife, I must begin and learn how to make—stooks."

"Old MacPherson sent word to me about cutting the roads last night," said Jock. "His bit of glebe land fits into some of my crop, so we work the whole together. Every one turns to at harvest-time—Christina when she's here, and the old boy himself."

"What fun!" said Angela. "I am longing to begin. When shall we start?"

He looked at her rather wistfully.

"Are you tired already of—only me?" he asked.

"Jock, how can you!" she exclaimed. "It is quite the other way. You would get tired of me. You are far too big and strong to have nothing to do but play about with a useless woman. You would get sick of me."

"Ah no, I wouldn't," he said. "You see, I have never had any one to love me in the way that you love me. I often ask myself if it isn't a dream, that you really belong to me?"

"Dearest," she answered, "I do belong to you, and we are never going to be separated! Whether it is work or play, we are always going to be together. And gathering in our harvest will be a more wholesome occupation than sitting in a boat looking at a Burying Island."

So she had her way, and bound him to her with ever stronger bands of love.

CHAPTER XVI

"WHO says that I am not a fitting helpmate for a working man? Just look at them! Dear things! They are so beautifully made; and see how they lean confidingly up against each other. I've trimmed their little tails so nicely, and all their heads are equal, and their waistbands are so neatly tied! They are the best-made stooks in the whole field."

"They ought to be. You've taken the whole day to make them."

"Well, and they do me credit. Your stooks—ragged, untidy things, all hunched up together! Look at the difference!" And Angela waved her hands to the four corners of the harvest-field.

"She grows prettier and prettier every day. I wonder where it can end?" was the thought in the mind of the man looking down at her.

Nature's sun, and the sun of happiness, had touched with a richer beauty the flower-like bloom of her loveliness and added a deeper lustre to her eyes. She was standing in front of him with a sickle in her hand; her wide straw hat, with the blue ribbon dangling over the brim, was pushed to the back of her head, and showed where the dark hair curled softly, like a child's, about her temples and white brow.

Jock was in his shirt-sleeves, and they were turned up

above his elbows, and his arms were as brown as his face; for they had been harvesting for more than a week, and the last field of grain had been laid low that day.

A cloudless sky and warm sunshine had smiled upon them since the first hand-sweep of corn had been cut by Angela herself. It had been a pretty ceremony, her cutting of the first sheaf. On the morning that she had entered the harvest-field with Jock, old Mr. MacPherson had met and welcomed her. Behind him stood the harvesters; and in the background were assembled a great gathering of men and women and children from the glens and from the hills. Some of them had travelled far to be present, for they were all eager to see their young chief's bride.

Mr. MacPherson had put a shining new sickle into Angela's hand, and led her up to the place where the grain stood highest. And she had cut her sheaf and bound it, and at a whispered word from the old man she had presented it to her husband!

The shout which had gone up from the hearts of these simple people had told her, if she required to be told, how loyal was the love which they bore to their chief.

"I was so dreadfully afraid that I would do something silly," she had said to Jock afterwards. "It made a lump come in my throat."

"You behaved beautifully," he told her proudly. "For it was rather sprung upon us, and that poetical idea of the old man's making you give me the sheaf took me aback. I wasn't prepared for such a climax."

"That was the bit which pleased them most," said Angela triumphantly. "How they cheered! Gaelic lends itself to enthusiasm. And then when you made a speech and answered for me, they cheered wildly,

didn't they? Can't we do something for them? Give them a treat?"

"We will give them a supper—a real good one, at Christmas," said Jock. "I always do something of the kind, but this year we will be extravagant. It's better to do it then than now! I don't want to interfere with the harvest, you see——"

Angela laughed.

"You need not explain. It would mean lots of whiskey, and they would all dance reels instead of cutting your corn."

Angela had carried her shining new sickle all through these happy days of harvesting; and now it had come to the last day, and she looked at it regretfully and touched the sharp edge with her finger.

"We will hang it up in the hall," she said to Jock, "and keep it always."

"Yes," he answered, "we'll do that to-night—after dinner." He put up his arms and stretched himself.

"Don't you think we might have tea now? We've done our day's work. Where's Christina? Isn't it about time for her to appear with her teapot and her kettle?"

Angela shaded her eyes and looked across the field to the slope of the bank above. "I see her coming down the path from the manse," she said. "She's carrying the teapot in one hand and the kettle in the other."

Jock laughed.

"Then I'm off to help. I shall have a row with her, as usual, about carrying that kettle!"

"We will have tea here, beside my beautiful stooks," Angela called after him. And she made a nest for herself and sat down to watch the meeting of the two with a smile on her lips.

It always amused her to watch Jock and Christina. During these days of harvest-time she had made Christina's acquaintance, although acquaintance was not the word she used in her heart. She had grown to love Christina, as Jock had told her she would. She had never met any one in the least like her before. Christina was so strong and protective; she took such a breezy, healthy view of life; she was so full of racy humour; the very grip of her hand would have put vitality into a stone.

Christina was much younger than the minister, her brother, and she had a profession—a wide-interested vocation in life. She was a nurse, and was matron of a private nursing home, which was a model of excellence and good management. She always spent her holidays at Glenmoira, and it generally happened that it was during the harvest-time that she revisited her Highland home, which she loved so well.

Angela's smile deepened as she watched Jock and Christina. Every afternoon Christina brought down tea to the harvest-field, because the manse was so near, and she and Jock were always having squabbles as to who was to carry the kettle.

On this particular afternoon they had a longer squabble than usual, and Angela grew impatient—or pretended that she was.

"Everything is ready," she cried. "Do hurry, because I am so thirsty."

She had finished her share of the preparations, which consisted of unpacking Flossie's basket and laying out the cups and saucers and Sheila's scones.

There was an answering call from Jock, and she saw the two crossing the stubble; and presently Christina, with a large brown teapot in her hand, was standing

beside her and being commanded to admire the stooks.

"I made them all by myself!—every bit of them," declared Angela; and Christina, looking down into the lovely face upraised to hers, smiled approvingly.

Christina was a big woman, but she carried no superfluous flesh on her bones. She had reddish fair hair, which she wore tucked away in thick plaits under a mushroom hat. Her face was more homely than beautiful, and her mouth turned up humorously at the corners. Her eyes were a greenish grey, and they could look very shrewd or twinkle with amusement, according to the mood of the moment.

Jock seated himself beside Angela, and they both held out their cups.

"We are so thirsty," they exclaimed; and Christina beamed at them and began to fill Angela's cup first.

"Oh!—oh!" The two aghast "Oh's!" followed each in quick succession. Nothing but hot water flowed from the spout of the brown teapot.

"Is it a joke?" asked Jock.

"Shake the teapot!" suggested Angela.

But no amount of shaking could make anything stronger than hot water come out of the spout. Christina's astonishment was quite genuine. She took off the lid and stirred the water.

"There's not a particle of tea in it—there never was!" said Jock.

"This is what she does to her poor patients," said Angela. "If you break a toe, Jock, and go into that model home of hers, you will know what to expect. If you ask for a poultice, she'll give you a jam sandwich. No saying what she will do. And we believed in her so, didn't we?"

Christina put down the teapot and stared at it incredulously.

"I think the thing's bewitched!" she said. "I could swear that I put in the tea—a spoonful for each, and one for the teapot. And then—then I went to put on my hat, for the kettle was not quite come to the boil, and—— Yes, I know I put in the tea; I can see myself doing it."

"I wish we had seen you doing it," said Angela. "Christina, you know you never did. It's no use pretending."

"I never remember doing such a queer-like thing in my life before," said Christina, rising. "I'm sorry, but it won't take me long to run back and make some fresh."

She poured away the hot water and tucked the teapot under her arm.

"I'll go back," said Jock. "I can run quicker than you!"

"Indeed no!" retorted Christina. "I'm as quick on my feet as you are." And she commenced to run.

Jock allowed her to get away a few paces, and then he overtook her; and lifting her off her feet, as gently as though she were a baby, he deposited her upon the ground, and taking away her teapot was off like a hare across the field.

"Oh, Christina?" cried Angela. "How could you taunt him? You might have known what he would do!"

"I'm not going to have him rummaging in my cupboards," answered Christina indignantly; and gathering herself up, she was soon in hot pursuit, following the flutter of Jock's kilt, as he dodged in and out between the lines of stooks.

"I believe she provoked th. race on purpose to have a flirt with him all by herself," laughed Angela. "Oh dear! I wonder when I shall ever get any tea."

Presently she saw Mr. MacPherson coming towards her from the opposite direction, and, rising, she went to meet him, and brought him to the place where she had laid out the tea-things, and made a comfortable seat for him amongst the corn-sheaves, for she saw that he was tired with his day's work. Then she sat down beside him, and talked to him sweetly and gently, for she had grown to reverence and love the old minister, and she had tender recollections of his fatherly kindness to Jock and herself on their wedding-day.

When Jock and Christina returned, they brought with them a brimming teapot full of hot, strong tea; but Christina could give no satisfactory explanation of what had happened to the first one. She was not allowed to forget what she had done, and had to undergo a running fire of chaff as to the management of her model "home."

After tea was finished, she looked at her brother and said severely:

"Archibald! you're tired. I'm going to take you home now, and make you put up your feet and take a good rest. To-morrow's the Sabbath, remember!"

"I had not forgotten that," said Mr. MacPherson. His eyes travelled slowly over the peaceful scene around him—his bit of glebe land and Jock's few fields surrounding it: a small oasis of culture—a mere handful, it would seem, to most men; but to those two who had tended it from sowing to reaping, it meant much.

"I never remember a better harvest in the glen," he said. He looked at Angela and smiled. "Since ever you put your sickle to the grain we have had pros-

perity." Then he took off his hat and added reverently, "The Lord be praised for His bountiful mercies."

After Christina had borne him away, to take his well-earned rest, Jock and Angela sat on by themselves. Jock lay back and smoked his pipe contentedly, and his eyes also travelled over the peaceful scene; but they always came back to the face beside him, and rested there longest. It was the loveliest bit of it all; the scene was but the setting for its fairness.

"He is a dear old man," said Angela, who was watching the two figures as they mounted the bank opposite Mr. MacPherson still held his hat in his hand, and the light fell on his silvery hair.

"Yes," answered Jock meditatively. "And he can preach, too! I've heard that old chap preach sermons that for poetic beauty and dramatic oratory would have won him an archbishopric."

"That's all very well for you, because you understand them," said Angela; "but I can't! I wish he did not preach in Gaelic."

"It's a very primitive congregation, you must remember," said Jock. "They would only understand the half of what he said if he preached in English."

"The next time he gives us anything specially beautiful, will you translate it for me?" And Angela turned her head to smile into his eyes, and he forgot everything except the immediate present.

After a little while Jock sat up, and knocked the ashes out of his pipe against his boot.

"Do you know what Sheila told me this morning?" he said.

Angela shook her head.

"That the larder's nearly empty. You for a housekeeper!"

"I'm going to begin housekeeping the very first wet day," she said. "I'm waiting for it—really I am; but it won't come."

"I hope it won't until our corn is carried," said Jock. He put on his coat, which had been hanging over his shoulders, and stood up. A cloudless haze had gathered in the west, and the sun was sinking into it, like a great copper-coloured ball, and the strong, pungent smell of ripe grain was rising from the land. "Just the time for the blackcock to come in," he said, looking about him. "They'll be after the new-cut corn. I saw some sitting on the stooks last night."

"And the larder's nearly empty," remarked Angela.

Jock nodded.

"I'll go home and get my gun. You wait here—I won't be long."

She called after him, as he was walking away:

"Bring my plaid back with you."

"All right," he said; and when he returned he wrapped the plaid round her, and they moved away to another part of the field to a place which suited his plans better.

"We have to be wary," he explained. "We must hide ourselves"; and he pulled some stooks down and repiled them to make a shelter, into which they crept, leaving a small space open from where they could see without being seen.

"It's like playing at robbers," said Angela under her breath. "How shall we know when they are coming?"

"We shall hear them," answered Jock; and they sat and listened and waited, and presently they heard the whirring sound of strong wings beating the air, and what seemed like a black cloud in the fading light descended on the corn-field.

"How tame they are!" whispered Angela. "They

are walking about on the ground like old barn-door fowls. And how they gobble! I never saw such greedy beasts. They are so busy eating they haven't time to think of being shot. Look at those on the stooks! How they're tearing at them."

"It's not much fun knocking them over sitting," whispered back Jock. He picked up a lump of hard earth and gave it to her. "Chuck it into the middle of them. I'll get them as they rise." And as she was about to obey, he threw a couple of cartridges into her lap, and added quickly, "Have them ready for me to reload—you know how."

The next minute there was the sound of birds on the wing: two sharp reports in quick succession, and the click of Jock's gun as it ejected the empty cartridges and he reloaded. He thrust his head above the barricade and sent another couple of shots after the rising birds.

He waited a moment or two, and then crept out and returned, swinging a brace of blackcock in his hand.

"Two nice young ones," he said. "That last was yours. He was pretty far out. I wouldn't have got him if you hadn't been so quick."

Angela had not lost the trick of blushing at his praise.

"I am so glad that I can really help," she said.

He crawled back into the shelter.

"We'll wait for another lot," he said. "They'll come in again. They'll gorge fit to burst their crops over this new-cut field."

After some waiting, the birds came down again on the stooks, and Jock got another brace.

"That will do for to-night," he said. "It's getting

dark, and I hate letting wounded birds away. We'll leave this nice fat one at the manse on our way back."

So they started for home, Jock with his gun over his shoulder, and Angela carrying her sickle. And that evening after dinner Jock hung the sickle up in the hall.

"Whenever we look at it," said Angela, "it will remind us of the first harvest we cut together."

"Your harvest," said Jock. "I don't believe there has ever been such a harvest cut in the glen before."

CHAPTER XVII

ALTHOUGH Angela could not understand Mr. MacPherson's sermons, it never occurred to her to stay at home and allow Jock to go to church by himself.

The primitive service interested her. The bare white walls, and the wooden pulpit, perched like a box above the heads of the congregation, and the curious drone of the Gaelic singing, and Mr. MacPherson's dramatic gestures and fine flow of language, although unintelligible, were all things which held a fascination for her. She watched the people's faces, and with her peculiarly imaginative faculty for weaving romance into the trivialities of life, she would make up stories about them; and so she was never tired or bored.

The chief's pew occupied a small gallery all to itself high up facing the pulpit. It was reached by an outside stone stair which made it quite private from any other part of the church; and red curtains hung at either end to keep off draughts, so that no inconvenience of being overlooked was felt by those who occupied it.

Dileas always accompanied his master to church, but he liked to sit outside on the top step of the stair, and from there he looked down on the other dogs—plebeian collies, who lay about in the churchyard whilst their masters worshipped within.

It was growing into late October now, and there was

a crispness in the air. The harvest had been carried and stacked, and Mr. MacPherson had made a public mention of thanksgiving from the pulpit as fitting to the occasion.

"It was not anything out of the way," said Jock afterwards, when Angela had asked for a translation. "I've heard him make a much better sermon, when there's nothing to be thankful for. He rises best to adversity."

But the Sunday after the Harvest Thanksgiving Angela knew by the expression on Jock's face that the old minister was in one of his moods of fervent spiritual elation. Christina had left some days before, to take up her busy life anew, and Angela concluded that he was feeling the effects of the parting.

At the beginning of the service Angela always took up her position with becoming dignity in the big chair at the end of the pew, where it was considered the proper place for the chief's wife to sit. Jock sat in what had been his father's place at the other end; and he always hung his round blue bonnet on the crooked handle of his stick and propped it against the door.

But when the sermon began, Angela descended from her dignity, and making a noiseless flight down the pew, sidled up close to Jock. No one could see them behind the red curtain.

She always had some excuse ready. "The church-mouse has been nibbling at my toes and I am so frightened," she would whisper. And he would take her hand in his and hold it through the sermon, and she was content to listen and think her own thoughts.

"What was it all about to-day?" she asked him, on the Sunday afternoon following Christina's departure. "You kept your face turned away all the time; you

only looked at me once, and I don't believe you saw me even then. I know that look! It means that you are thinking of something which you only see inwardly."

They were sitting up on the grass knoll which rose at the back of the house. It was their favourite Sunday afternoon walk, to climb to the top of it. Jock was still careful of her weak ankle; but as he helped her up the steep bit, and his arm was very strong, she never found the way too hard.

There was a seat just below the actual summit of the knoll, facing west. And Angela loved to watch the sunsets from there.

Jock did not answer the question. He was looking up, watching the flight of a bird above his head.

"The beggar!" he exclaimed. "I believe he knows that it's Sunday, and that I haven't got my gun."

He raised his stick to his shoulder, and pointed it at the dark object which was winging its v within easy shot.

"What a funny noise it is making!" said Angela. "A kind of cheeping cry—a cry like a child in pain."

"Don't you see?" he said. "It's a hawk, and he's carrying a bird in his claws—a young grouse, I expect. That's why he is flying so heavily. He can't rise."

"Oh Jock! is it the grouse that is crying?"

"Yes! They're such strong brutes, these hawks. I've shot them more than once flying, with their prey in their talons. Sometimes they get hold of a young rabbit. The poor little beast will cry just as though it were human."

He followed the bird with his stick, until it rounded the bend of the knoll.

"And now—will it tear the grouse to pieces, and devour it?" asked Angela.

"Yes," said Jock, and he dropped his stick on the heather beside him.

She shuddered, and drew her cloak together.

"Are you cold?" he asked quickly.

"No—but—— Oh Jock! Nature is horribly cruel!—horribly, remorselessly cruel!" There was a piteous, frightened anguish in the eyes which she turned upon him.

"My dear!" he remonstrated, taken aback.

"Yes, it is!" she broke out impetuously. "It is so deceptive, so subtle, so treacherous. It can be so peaceful, and good, and holy—like now. Could anything be more beautiful than this lovely scene all round us? But—you never know! It may be just waiting, and when you trust it most it may spring some terrible, awful tragedy upon you: something that will rend and kill, and sweep happiness away, as though it had never been, and leave nothing but the awfulness of desolation behind; awful, because you know what the happiness has been."

She was trembling. Her eyes were fixed on the deepening crimson of the sky, and silently Jock watched her face. Her voice rose and fell in sweet, musical rhythm, for she could not make it sound harsh, even had she willed, and its vibrating tones thrilled and moved him. She shuddered again.

"Do you know what Nature often reminds me of?" she said. "Of a great revolving wheel—a wheel with cogs. And some of them are kind, and catch you up out of the whirl of life and lay you down gently where you are safe and sure. But some are sharp—or heavy, like great weights—and cut and tear—or—break! And the poor mutilated thing which is at its mercy has every shred of courage crushed out of it; and then—it

throws away the thing it has broken." She covered her face with her hands: "But the wheel goes on—it can't stop. It has been set in motion by a hand which—— Do you think? Do you ever wonder? Sometimes—sometimes an awful feeling of horror comes over me, that perhaps the hand cannot stop the wheel. That it has given it life, and that the life has grown and grown—too strong for the hand, and——" She faltered, and her voice died away into a whisper.

Jock drew her into his arms. He was deeply distressed, for he had never seen her in a mood like this before. He let her lean against him, but did not caress her. She did not seek caresses; she wanted understanding.

When he felt the trembling cease, he said gently:

"What makes you feel like that?"

"I don't know," she said slowly. "Instinct, perhaps—imagination. Imagination most, I suppose. Feeling what other people are feeling. That's the worst, and—the best of imagination. I can't help feeling what other people are feeling. Things—impressions—instinctive meanings—come so quickly. They seem to be printed on my brain unconsciously. I can't help it. It's very uncomfortable sometimes."

She moved a little, and found a more comfortable resting-place for her head; but he did not interrupt her, and she continued:

"I was not brought up in the ordinary kind of way, you know. Perhaps that had something to do with it. I had no brothers and sisters. I can't remember my mother; and my father—his memory is very vague. Flossie really brought me up. He was very fond of me; but—I think I was a kind of experiment. His theory of bringing me up was to make me learn to

develop myself. His favourite boast is that he never blindfolded me."

Jock did not make any comment, and she looked up at him. There was something in his expression which made her ask what he was thinking about.

"I was looking back," he said, "and—putting things together."

"Putting things together. How? Why?" she asked quickly.

"I mean, I could see that among those people—the Potter lot—well, you didn't really belong to them."

She laid her head down again on his shoulder.

"They were a very mixed lot," she said. "Some of them were all right. Dolly is a dear little thing, and I'm so sorry for her having such a horror as Montague Potter for a husband. It would be dreadfully unfair to taboo her because of him; and then, of course, he has heaps and heaps of money, and money counts for such a lot, doesn't it?"

Jock put a curl of hair back from her forehead.

"Money did not count for much with you, or you would not have married me," he said.

"You would have been, you—just the same," she answered. Her mood grew grave again. She spoke a little timidly. "Did I shock you just now, when I spoke like that about Nature and that terrible wheel? When you get down to the very dregs of another kind of nature than this lovely one here all round us, sordid, degrading misery, with nothing to redeem it from its utter hopelessness—that shakes you! You wonder at me, and you are going to ask me how I know such things. I had a friend; and she took up slumming; and I asked her to take me with her, and

she did; but——" She freed herself from his arm. She sat up and pushed back the soft hat she wore, impatiently, from her brow. "That's where I am no use," she exclaimed. "That's where my imagination makes such a fool of me. I went; and the things I saw and could not make any better—the despair of it—possessed me. I could not get it out of my head. I made myself miserable and ill and—utterly useless! Yes, that was the worst of it—utterly useless!" She looked at Jock with tragic appeal. "Flossie found out what I was doing, and stopped me. 'If you had the temperament of a fish, you might be able to nibble at the fringe of it; but you!—you'll kill yourself in six weeks, and no one will be a pin the better for it, except the undertaker,' was what he said. Fancy being told that! And it was quite true. I long to be able to do big things—things that would mean a kind of salvation to humanity—and I'm so ridiculously constituted that I can do nothing when it comes to the doing."

Jock looked still more distressed. He wanted to comfort her, but did not know how.

"I ought not to have spoken like that about Nature," she said remorsefully—"likening it to that terrible wheel. You love Nature; you trust it so."

"I've been brought up to believe in Nature," said Jock simply. "It won't let you get out of your depth somehow. There's the feeling that behind it, behind what we see and feel, there is a deeper depth still—the depth that nothing can fathom."

"It satisfies you," said Angela, and she sighed.

"It is the witness of the unseen; the embodiment of —God to me," said Jock reverently. "There is no death in Nature. Everything goes on—life reshaping life; it is the fulfilling of the eternal destiny. It gives

one an assurance of limitless strength—at least, that's how I feel about it."

For some time they sat silent, watching, until the sun's rim had dipped below the horizon line.

"Wouldn't you like to go down now?" said Jock. "It will come up cold presently."

"I'm not cold," she answered. "We will wait a little longer. The most beautiful bit of a sunset is the afterglow. There is no dazzle then, and I love to watch the sky when it melts into that pale green colour below the blue, and the little pearly fluffs of cloud turn from pink to purple against the light. We will wait till then. Tell me about Mr. MacPherson's sermon. You were so interested in the hawk that you never answered my question about it. What was the text?"

Jock thought for a minute and then he repeated, slowly:

"'When the time was come that He should be received up, He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem'—that was it. The text was in St. Luke, the ninth chapter and the fifty-first verse."

"Yes?" questioned Angela.

But Jock was thinking; and she knew that he would not speak until he had thought out what he was going to say.

"The point that the old man worked his sermon round was on the significance of the word 'stedfastly,'" he said at length: "'He set His face stedfastly.' I wish I could translate for you the poetry of the language, but I can't! I can only give you the sense of it. He began this way: The time had come—the time for the Crucifixion. It was irrevocable. Christ was to die on the Cross. It was a most awful death—the most cruel and humiliating that could be imagined: a

lingering agony, held up to the scoffing jeers of the people whom He was dying to save. He knew all that when He set His face to Jerusalem. It wasn't as though He were going in to a fight with the chance of winning through. He knew to the last drop what that death meant—and He set His face—stedfastly. He stopped on the way many times, helping people—little children, and weak women, and all sorts of poor hopeless creatures. But He never swerved. After every interruption He set His face—stedfastly. He went on to meet that awful doom."

Jock paused, and Angela touched his hand.

"Please go on," she whispered. "I love the tone of your voice when you speak of things like that."

"But I'm not good at explaining," said Jock. "I can't bring out the grandeur of the subject. Of course he went on to draw the inference: the example set to us. That our lives should be the sacrifice of self, the following up of what we set ourselves to do—stedfastly."

"Oh, Jock! I wish I was good like you," said Angela wistfully. "You would do that. You would set your face stedfastly. Your faith is so strong, and yet so simple. I will never be like that; I am not strong enough to be simple." The sweet voice faltered. "I—I may grow better, living with you; but would it be a right sort of betterness? I should be good because you are good, because I wished to go to the same heaven as you. Heaven would not be heaven without you. If——" She leant forward, and stretched out her arms to the glory of the dying day. "Look!" she cried—"look at those great bars of light, like golden gates; and you see the beyond through the bars. It is like heaven waiting for us!"

Suddenly she turned to him, and, with a cry, threw herself upon his breast. Wildly she wept, and wildly she clung to him. Her tears were on his cheek as he strained her to him.

"My darling!—my darling! What is the matter?" he implored.

"If you were to go in first," she sobbed, "between these bars, and leave me—outside? Oh, you won't! Promise me—promise me that you won't leave me behind? I could not live without you—I could not! I am not strong like you; I could not set my face—stedfastly, and—and go on—alone."

He loosened the little cold hands which clung round his neck, and held them in his firm, warm cla[illegible]. He kissed her passionately, telling her that he would never leave her, that she was his love, his darling, heart of his heart. He did not well know what he said, what he promised—only that she was dearer to him than life itself.

She sobbed herself quiet in his arms, like a tired child. Her breath came in long-drawn sighs. When she raised her head and tried to smile, it was a very tearful smile. She whispered that he must forgive her, for she had made him unhappy, and there was nothing to be unhappy about.

"It was that cruel hawk, with the grouse in its claws, that began it," she explained. "That pitiful, crying sound like a child in pain, was dreadful! I can't bear to hear an animal suffering. And then the sunset! It looked so like a gate, and the bars seemed to be closing. It put the idea of being shut out into my head."

"It was only a sunset," said Jock; "and it's all faded now, and I'm going to take you home. It's getting cold and dark. Your poor little hands are like ice!"

"I am cold," she admitted.

"Come!" he said. "Shall we run down the hill to warm you up? No! I forgot about your ankle."

But she stood looking up at him.

"I wonder," she said slowly—"I wonder what you would do if you found out that I was a horrid little fraud? I am, you know! I'm——"

But Jock only laughed as he put his arm through hers.

"We'll argue that out some other time," he said. "We're going home to tea now." And he helped her down all the steep turns of the hill-path, and they had tea together beside the fire in his den, and he made her forget her tears in the tenderness of his love.

CHAPTER XVIII

AND chill October merged into dull November, and the days crept on and grew shorter and darker, and the weather broke and a sweeping westerly gale scattered the last of the autumn leaves. Instead of russet and gold on the loch-side, and purple on the hill-slopes, grey mist and driven rain shrouded the face of the land.

When Angela looked out of the window on the first day of the storm, and saw the changed aspect of the scene and heard the patter of the rain on the garden paths, she said to Jock, who was standing near:

"Are you going out in this?"

"I must," he answered. "I have things to do. I can't stop in on account of the weather."

"Then I shall begin my housekeeping to-day," she said cheerfully. "I've always said I've been waiting for a wet day, haven't I? I am longing to begin. My head's bursting with ideas. It will be quite a business to know what to start on first."

Jock's unresponsiveness was very apparent.

"Are you not pleased?" she asked. She knew quite well that he was not pleased. She could read his face like a book. He was too transparently honest to be able to hide his feelings.

"You talk as if you wouldn't miss me a bit," he said

grudgingly. "And it will be the first day that we have not done everything together."

"Sometimes I was only able to watch you doing things from a distance," she corrected sweetly.

But Jock would not be cheered. He looked at her with gloomy reproach.

"I believe you're glad it's a wet day," he said, "and you can't watch me this time from a distance. I'm going over to Glenmoira. I had a letter from Potter last night; he wants me to see about the amount of game that's being sent him. He evidently doesn't think he's getting his money's worth."

"I hate that man!" exclaimed Angela. "He treats Glenmoira just as he would a poulterer's shop, and you the man behind the counter!"

"It's to my interest to look after the place," said Jock. "Even as it is—things are going to pieces!"

"Never mind, dear," she said quickly. She could not bear to see the shadow which always fell on his face at any reference to Glenmoira. "This is Mr. Potter's last year, isn't it? You will only have to put up with him for one more season, and then——" She broke off.

"It won't make much difference," Jock answered, and he sighed. "You see, there's no end to it. If it is not Potter, it will be some other man—whoever bids highest."

She was very sweet to him, and full of pretty, tender good-byes when, a little later, he took his departure. She watched him go down the garden path and under the holly arch and round the bend of the road with Dileas following at his heels; and then she stood for some minutes at the door watching to see if he would make some excuse to return, but he did not.

She went back into the house, and paused in the

hall, listening. It felt so quiet, so empty, so deathly still.

"How awful it is without him!" she murmured, and resolutely tried to shake off the chill of loneliness which she felt creeping over her. "He promised to be back in time for tea. I must begin and do something at once, so as not to have time to think."

What would she do first? she asked herself. She went upstairs to her room, and spent the next hour in turning out the contents of her boxes, which she had never found time thoroughly to unpack. And then she sat down to survey the chaos she had created.

"What useless things maids are!" she exclaimed, the childish trick of talking aloud to herself coming back to her naturally when she was alone. "I never saw such a lot of stupid clothes," she continued wrathfully. "I shall lock them all up again."

It was easier said than done.

"They seem to take more room going in than they did coming out," she panted, trying to squeeze a Paquin ball-gown under the tray of an already bulging box. "Go in!—you must! I don't want you." And, sitting down on the lid she bumped up and down until she succeeded in making the lock catch. "There! You're finished," she said triumphantly, and went on to the next box.

"I shall keep out all these pretty frilly things with the blue ribbons run through them. He likes blue ribbons," she soliloquised, sorting into neat bundles some filmy white garments which were scattered round her on the floor. "And that!" She held up a soft, clinging wisp of a tea-gown. "It's easy to slip on in a hurry, and I'm always in a hurry when I'm dressing for dinner, because the post-bag comes in just as the bell rings. I shall keep that out."

She worked busily. The next time she sat down she surveyed her surroundings with satisfaction.

"I've done it beautifully, and in half the time Antoinette would have taken. I can't think what maids do. Yes"—she glanced round—"everything is neat and tidy. All the silly things I don't want put back in their boxes, and the things I do want folded away in the cupboards." She leant back in her chair. "I've enjoyed doing it. I believe tidying up is a born instinct in a woman. How I loved sweeping out my dolls' house! and I used to make my dolls' clothes too. There was that big doll, and its clothes came off and on: I made lots of them."

She gazed abstractedly at nothing for a little while, and then she picked up one of the white frilly things with the blue ribbons running through it, and examined it carefully.

"I believe I could sew as well as that," she murmured. "I'm sure I could—even better. That is done by some poor thing who only wants the money; and if—if I had to do it, I would be sewing beautiful thoughts into every seam." She bent her head and scrutinised the stitching. "Such dear little seams and little tucks and button-holes! I wonder if I have forgotten how to make button-holes?"

She laid the pretty thing back in its place, and going over to the window, stood looking out at the rain and the driving mist, but the grey aspect did not depress her. Her lips were smiling. She was looking, not at the rain-drenched hills, but down a golden pathway of her own imagining. She saw visions—a wealth of imagery beyond the ken of outward sight, as beautiful as the enchantment of the dawn.

"If—if that were—ever to happen," she whispered to

the rain-drops on the window-pane. But the rain-drops were too busy running after each other to pay any attention to her whisper.

Lunch-time came, and the empty chair gave her a renewed feeling of desolation.

"He might have left Dileas with me," she said to herself. "If he ever goes away again I shall make him leave Dileas on trust. Dileas doesn't understand anything except Gaelic, but he can look intelligent, and when I say 'Jock' he knows what I mean."

After lunch she wrote some letters, but got up several times to go and look at the eight-day clock in the hall.

"I should like to shake you!" she said to it. "Why don't you hurry up? Only four o'clock. I may like you better when you strike half-past. It will be tea-time then."

The idea of tea gave her an inspiration.

"I might do a little housekeeping now," she said; and she opened the door leading into the kitchen and looked in.

The lamp was lit, but the kitchen was deserted, for Sheila had gone out to her own cottage. She had put everything in order. The tea-tray was set ready to carry in when Jock returned.

Sheila had evidently left in the middle of her work. Some half-finished ironing was lying on a table—a neat bundle of blue-checked aprons and a snowy white cap.

"Sheila's mutch!" said Angela, picking up the cap; and a second later she was trying it on before a looking-glass which hung on the wall. She tied the strings under her chin, and craned her head round to catch the back view of herself in the glass.

"I look exactly like Sheila," she murmured; and running back to the table, she shook out one of the

blue-checked aprons and tied it round her waist. "And there's her little tartan shawl hanging on the peg of the door!" she cried delightedly. "On you go too!"

She was standing on tiptoe, so as to admire as much of herself as possible in the glass, when she heard Jock's whistle, and he was barely inside the house before he was calling her name. Hastily turning down the lamp, she caught up a broom, and was busy sweeping some imaginary cinders under the grate, when he put his head in at the door and said:

"I have come back, Sheila. You can bring in the tea"; and, not waiting for an answer, he went out again.

Angela laughed gleefully.

"What fun! He was quite taken in"; and creeping in behind the door, which Jock had left open, she stood listening.

She heard him go through the downstairs part of the house, then his step on the stairs, calling her name as he went. Now he was moving about above; another minute he was coming down the stairs again very quickly.

She peeped from her hiding-place. He was standing, his head thrown up, listening. He looked like a stag scenting danger.

"I shall have to come out now. It is a shame to tease him," she murmured; but Jock forestalled her intention.

He wheeled round quickly, and striding across to the door, behind which she was lurking, threw it open.

"Sheila! where is your mistress?" he said in a peremptory voice, not at all like his usual mode of speaking.

He had flattened the door against Angela with the violence of his entrance, and stood with his back to her

She popped her head round the corner of the keyhole, the frilled cap framing her face, and imitated Sheila's soft drawl.

"Will it be the master himself whatever?" she said. Then she laughed. "Oh, you old silly, not to know your own wife!"

But she was not prepared for the effect of her pleasantry. Jock staggered back, almost as though he had been struck; then recovering himself, he caught her and drew her from her hiding-place up to the lamp.

"It—is you! Good God, what a fright you gave me!"

He sat down on the edge of the table, and she saw that his face had blanched white. She could not have believed that the tanned skin could have lost its colour so quickly. He still held her in front of him. Then he took off her cap and dropped it on the floor, and the shawl and the checked apron followed.

"Oh, Jock!" she cried aghast, "I—I thought you would be amused."

"Amused!—amused! To come back and not find you! I never got such a fright in my life."

"But I thought I looked so nice," pleaded Angela. "Didn't you think I made a pretty old woman?"

"I don't want to see you look like an old woman," he answered. Then he threw his arms round her with rough vehemence. "Never play a trick like that on me again," he said. "I had been looking forward all day to finding you watching for me; and to come into an empty house and not to see you! not to hear you answer when I called! It was horrible! It was as if you were dead!"

"No, dear, I won't; I promise," she said meekly. "We'll forget all about it. I promise never to give you

surprises like that again." She picked up the cap and the shawl and the apron, and laid them aside. "Shall we have tea now?" she said. "Sheila has left everything ready." She clapped her hands. "I know! We'll have it in here. You must keep on sitting on the table—I'm sure a working man sits on the kitchen table; and we will put the tray between us—so! How much tea shall I put in? Oh, Jock, do you remember poor Christina and the hot water, and how vexed she was?"

"Yes," said Jock, who had recovered himself sufficiently to allow a smile to cross his face. "Poor Christina! How we chafted her!"

"Yes," said Angela. "She really was dreadfully vexed, because, of course, being a nurse, it hurt her pride to let us think she had made a mistake; and it wasn't her mistake. A stupid little new servant had swished the tea out of the teapot with hot water whilst Christina had gone to put on her hat. I always forgot to tell you the explanation of that story."

So they had tea together in the kitchen; and Jock sat on the table and Angela made the tea, and Jock regained his peace of mind. Then she gave him a description of how she had spent her day.

"And, Jock, do you know what I simply must get—simply must? A work-basket!" she exclaimed. "Not a useless thing for show, but a real old-fashioned one. Wouldn't you like to see me darning your stockings? A real nice work-basket would keep me out of mischief. It would keep me busy, and then I would not have time to play silly jokes! You know, there's no use in my trying to do housekeeping, because Sheila does it far better than I ever could."

Some few evenings later the post-bag was delayed, and did not arrive until after dinner.

Jock brought in the letters himself, and a parcel which he laid down beside Angela.

"It's addressed to you," he said.

"A parcel! For me? I don't expect anything."

She examined the label.

"Suppose you open it?" suggested Jock. "Shall I unfasten the string for you?"

The string was undone, and many wrappings removed. When Angela came to the last, her cheeks grew pink.

"I know!" she cried.

Jock was bending over her, and she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him, and then quickly pulled off the last wrapper. There it was! A large round work-basket!

"Oh!" she gasped breathlessly, after she had lifted the lid and looked underneath.

For quite half an hour she played with the contents of her work-basket.

"Why did you kiss me for it?" said Jock, who was watching her. "You never even asked where it came from?"

"As if I did not know!" she retorted. Then she added softly: "You give me everything. It was not difficult to guess."

She looked round the room.

"Now, what can I begin on?"

Jock had risen, and was filling his pipe by the fireplace.

"Isn't there something about you that wants mending?" she asked.

"No, I don't think so," he answered.

"There must be!"

She had threaded a needle with a long black thread, and was drawing it through her fingers and waving it slowly from side to side.

"Do you know what you look like?" said Jock, laughing. "Like a cat when it's switching its tail about, waiting to pounce on a mouse!"

"And you're the mouse," she answered; and her eyes settled on his kilt. "It's too long," she said. "Let me run a tuck in it."

"It isn't too long," answered Jock indignantly.

"Well, it hangs crooked, then! It droops down at the side. Come here, and I'll show you. I could give it a pinch up in two minutes." And she tied a knot on her thread.

Jock edged away from her.

"There's nothing wrong with my kilt. It's a very good kilt. It was one of my father's."

"Oh, that settles it! If it's as old as that, it must want something." She made a grab at him. "Let me see."

Jock escaped hastily out of reach of her hand. He sat down on a chair and tucked his kilt under him.

"You may do what you like with anything else, but I won't have my kilt touched," he said decidedly.

Angela sighed; her eyes roamed round the room again.

"There's a ring off that window-curtain up there. Now, how did that happen?"

"I did it," confessed Jock. "I only gave it a little tug."

Angela broke into a peal of laughter.

"Oh, Jock! you don't realise how strong you are. Your 'little tugs' are enough to bring the house about our ears. If you fetch down that curtain, I will sew on the ring. That would be doing something really useful."

"Has that taken a little of the energy out of you?" said Jock, after the ring had been sewn on and the

curtain hung up again. "Is it safe for me to come near you now?"

"Yes." She laughed, and sank back against the green cushion which always lay on the arm of her sofa. "Jock! how did you know where to get that basket?" she said suddenly. "All the fittings! How did you known what to choose?"

Jock looked at the green cushion and nodded gravely.

"Christina!" exclaimed Angela. "Jock, how sly you've been! You wrote and asked Christina to choose it. But it was nice of you. I think I would like to hug you again." She smiled up at him. "I wonder if any wife is so well taken care of as I am?"

It touched the tenderest chord within him when she spoke like that, and he flushed at her words.

"I'm so afraid of being clumsy, or stupid, about thinking of things for you," he said. "I've never had to do this kind of 'taking care' of any one before. I like to think that you have no one else—that you cannot do without me."

"That's just it," she answered. "I can't do without you."

CHAPTER XIX

"THE last Saturday night before Christmas—and the best week's earnings that I've collected yet," said Angela.

"Earnings? Thievings, you mean," answered Jock.

She was sitting on his knee, and had just finished turning out his pockets.

She went through this little ceremony every Saturday night, and then she tied up all the money she had found in her pocket-handkerchief.

"Sixpence more than last Saturday night," she said. "That is because I remembered to look in your sporran; I sometimes forget that that's a pocket too." She jingled the contents of her handkerchief triumphantly. "Do you know that the first thing I ever heard about you was that you lived upon porridge and whiskey, and counted your bawbees every Saturday night?" She jingled her handkerchief again. "They are my bawbees now."

"Yours!" he answered, looking at her askance. "They are mine! Earned by the sweat of my brow."

"Well," she retorted, "and doesn't a working man always give his wages to his wife to spend?"

"He gives her them—you take them," answered Jock. "You take everything of me. You're a shameless reiver."

"A reiver? What's that?" she cried. "Anything pretty?"

"A reiver is a robber! A thief! A marauding scoundrel! In olden times, when the clans used to be at war with each other, they——"

"Oh yes, I know; Flossie warned me," she interrupted. "When one clan had eaten up everything of its own, it went off on a foraging expedition and stole what it could steal from its next-door neighbour." She pursed up her mouth, and put her head on one side. "Reiving must be infectious. I'm becoming a typical Highlander. Don't you think so?"

"What are you going to do with your bawbees?" he asked. "There's nothing to spend your thievings on up here."

"What am I going to spend my bawbees on?" She still held her head on one side and studied him meditatively. "I'm going to—you will see. After Christmas I will give up reiving."

She hid her thievings in one of the pockets of her work-basket.

"To change the subject," she said, "I had a letter from Flossie to-night. He's going abroad. He'll have started by now. He says that an English Christmas gives him a fit of the blues; that the sight of the turkeys hanging up in the shop-windows makes him feel that he is only one degree removed from cannibalism. He never used to say these kind of things before; but—perhaps he feels lonely! Poor Flossie! I think he misses me, Jock. Where is his letter? Oh yes, here it is. He's going to stay abroad for months; perhaps go for a tour round the world. He says he has never done America, and—— Listen to this, Jock:

"'I am sending you my library subscription. I mean

the tangible part of it. The box ought to arrive almost as soon as you get this. I haven't a notion what books they may send. I'm rather cosmopolitan in my tastes, as you know, but you can make out the next list for yourself. I can't prevent your body from browsing in a state of bovine rusticity, but I can try to keep your mind from following suit.'

"That last remark is rather unkind—perhaps I ought not to have read it out," said Angela, folding up the letter. "Has it hurt you, dear? Flossie is jealous. He must have a tiny hit at you somewhere."

"I suppose he looks upon me as a kind of savage," said Jock. "I don't talk much about what I read, because I've never had any one that I could—give myself away to—about things I really feel."

"You can give yourself away to me," suggested Angela.

He smiled gravely.

"You are so quick. Your brain works like lightning. When I try to express myself, my tongue feels like a stiff key in a rusty lock."

"Your tongue is not quite so stiff as you think," answered Angela. "You nearly always get the best of an argument—perhaps that's because you're Scotch."

"We don't argue," remonstrated Jock. "We only discuss things—rub off each other's corners."

"There is one thing that I am thankful for," she continued, "and that is, that when you are sitting beside me here in the evenings, and you are reading—and I am reading—that you don't want to read me out scraps of your book. That's maddening. People who do that invariable gabble, or laugh, or skip from one bit to another, and all the cream has been skimmed off the book for you by the time you come to read it for

yourself. If you love me, Jock, don't read out aloud to me."

"Very well," said Jock. "I won't read to you—unless you ask me."

The following evening Flossie's book-box arrived, and after dinner Angela settled herself in her corner of the sofa, and Jock drew in his arm-chair and arranged the reading-lamp so that it should shed its light equally; and then he placed the box on the hearth-rug between them.

"Here is the key," said Angela. "It was sent to me."

"Your Flossie has been very generous," said Jock, after he had opened the box. He took out some half-dozen books, and laid them on the table.

"Is that all? I don't call that particularly generous," answered Angela.

"There are some more underneath," said Jock. "You look through your lot and see what they promise."

He had taken his pipe out of the rack and was slowly filling it.

Angela's eyes sparkled as she read the titles of the first two books.

"I love old favourites, of course," she said, looking across at Jock's well-filled bookshelves; "but there is something very refreshing in getting a new thing, isn't there? Ah!" as a familiar name caught her eye. "How delightful! His very last, and to keep for my own! Do you see? Here's a slip of paper inside. 'Sent by Lord Francis Carleton's orders.' How nice of Flossie; it is not even cut." She bent forward, and took Jock's skean-dhu out of his stocking. "I should always advise a woman to marry a Highlander; they make such useful husbands," she said. "Their wives get such nice

little pickings off them. This makes an excellent paper-knife," and she began running the sharp blade of the skean-dhu up the uncut leaves of the volume lying on her lap.

"Nice little pickings!" echoed Jock. "I should think you do get nice little pickings off me. To say nothing of stealing my money, you take my kilt pins for your ties, and my blue bonnet is as often on your head as it is on mine." He lit his pipe, and turning over the remainder of the books in the box, picked up one at random. His pipe was drawing well, and he settled himself comfortably in his chair.

Angela did not look up; she was still cutting the leaves of her book, and talking desultorily as she turned over the pages.

"There is something very much your own about a book that you cut for yourself," she remarked. She cut a few more pages. "This man's writing ought to appeal to you, Jock. He understands and loves Nature so. He makes you see the beauty of it through everything, and he is so human. You come across such nice bits, quite unexpectedly somehow, that seem to have been written specially for you yourself. Do you know that feeling?"

Jock did not answer, and she went on talking to herself. Sometimes when he was smoking he listened to her for quite a long time without speaking.

"There! I have cut half the book," she said. "I won't begin reading it just now. I shall keep it until I want to be freshened up. I know how it will make me feel—like a plant which has been hidden away in some dusty corner, and then put out into the rain. A geranium plant, I think. They look so miserable when they get dusty and dried up." She laughed. "Jock!

do you think I could ever look like a little musty-fusty geranium plant that wanted putting out into the rain?"

She glanced up. He had not heard her; he was absorbed in the book he was reading. She looked from his face to its cover, and a smothered exclamation was strangled on her lips.

"Now, what will happen?" she said to herself. "It will be intensely interesting to see how he takes it. He reads very quickly, although he says his tongue is like a rusty key in a stiff lock. It's big print—and very short." She took notice of how many pages he had already turned, and continued soliloquising, as she watched his face. "He has not got his first shock yet; he is just hovering on the brink. He hurried over those two last pages. He's skipping on a little. That line between his eyebrows always comes when he has one of his intense fits of concentration. If I spoke to him just now, he would not hear me." She picked up her book again, and went on quietly with the cutting of the pages. "I won't read just yet awhile," she murmured. "I want to see what effect that kind of book will have on my dear Bawbee!"

At last she finished her cutting. She leant back against the green cushion, and lay watching Jock's face. Once she glanced at the clock.

"He is giving it a fair trial. It is so characteristic of him to go on with a thing to the end, once he has begun; but he need not tell me afterwards that that was his only reason. I'll try an experiment."

She stretched out her hand and laid it on one of the pleats of his kilt. When they were sitting reading together, she would often do that; and sometimes without looking up he would take the hand and hold it

until she drew it away again. Perhaps it was that she craved a mute sympathy for some passage which she was reading. She would explain to him afterwards what it had been; but he always waited until she chose to speak of her own accord.

He did not take her hand. He raised his head and looked at her over the top of the book. The two sharp lines between his eyebrows were very strongly marked, and there was an expression in his eyes she had never seen there before.

She left her hand lying where it was. Against the dark greens and blues of the tartan and under the lamp's soft glow it looked a white, soft, fragile little thing. A sweet purity seemed to hover round it; and it lay as though confiding in his trust. But he did not touch it; and at last she drew it away.

She lifted one of the other books from the table beside her and opened it. She had barely glanced through the list of the many editions into which it had run, when there was a swishing sound heard, a thud against the top bar of the grate, and something landed violently in the heart of the fire. The logs burst into a blaze, and the sparks streamed up the chimney in long fiery tongues.

CHAPTER XX

"JOCK!" exclaimed Angela.

Jock was leaning forward, watching the hungry flames as they licked greedily round the cover of the book which he had thrown into the fire.

"Jock!" repeated Angela.

"Damn!" exclaimed Jock; and then he sat back in his chair and stared at her. His face was very red, and unutterable disgust was written on it.

Angela looked at him with raised eyebrows and said nothing. There was a few moments' silence, and then he blurted out abruptly:

"I beg your pardon."

"I've never heard you use that word before," she said.

"I've said I'm sorry," he answered.

She smoothed the page of the book lying open on her lap, and said slowly, as though measuring each word.

"I accept your apology; but—I expected to hear you say something like that."

"Why?"

"Because I have been watching you."

"Did you know what I was reading?"

"Yes," she answered.

He looked away from her. The fire had settled down into a fierce red glow, and a dark heap smouldered in its heart.

"You know the book? You have read it?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered.

He rose and stood by the mantelpiece, moving some ornaments in an aimless way which was very unlike him, and spoke jerkily.

"Have you—read many books of that kind? Is it that kind of stuff that—fed your imagination? You remember—that Sunday afternoon—when we talked up on the hill? You said you had learnt things from——" He looked down into the fire, and the lines between his eyebrows contracted sharply. "Was it from reading books—like—that, that you got the idea that Nature could be so cruel and remorseless—so degrading?"

"No," she answered quickly. "I told you where I got my ideas from. From seeing right down into the very depths of things themselves."

"I'm sorry you've read books like that." He spoke slowly, and with obvious difficulty. "I'm sorry that any girl should get her impressions of life from reading a book like that. Things that ought to be—sacred, are—described in a way—— Well, the descriptions are sheer sensualism."

There was a lengthened pause.

"But you were interested in the book," said Angela. "It threw a kind of glamour over you."

"No, it didn't," he answered. "It threw no glamour over me. I read—because I wanted to see how they were going to draw the moral lesson."

Angela threw back her head and watched him for a few moments from under her half-closed eyelids. Then she said:

"And did you not find the moral lesson? Don't you think that it was written with a meaning?—to give a warning?"

"Much more likely to send the warned to find out what it all means," answered Jock shortly. "It's so well gilded. That's where the —— trickery comes in. I've missed out the word this time, but I should like to have said it."

"Jock, I never saw you so roused about anything before," said Angela.

Jock took up the poker and thrust it into the smouldering mass and turned it over. The inner pages of the book had not yet been charred by the flames, and they fell open. A flash of light flared up and showed the clearly printed type, as easy to read as the meaning it sought to convey. He thrust the poker through the page, and taking up a peat-sod threw it on the blaze, covering and hiding what was beneath, and piled some wood on the top. Then he went over to the window, and, opening it wide, a rush of cold, pure air, laden with the clean breath of the first winter snowflakes, swept through the room. The sudden draught caught the fire and drew the flames up the chimney with a roar.

"You certainly do things thoroughly, Jock," said Angela.

Jock shut the window and came back to his chair and sat down. She held out her hand, but he did not take it.

"I saw it, that last time," he said. "You thought I did not notice—I did. But—I had that beastly thing in my own hand, and——" He forced himself to meet her eyes. "Do you think I'm a prig?" he asked.

She did not answer relevantly. Her glance wandered to the lines of book-shelves on the wall.

"You have read heaps of books a great deal stronger than that," she said. "The old writers, and—our best

writers—deal with the elemental passions. It is their finest theme."

"Yes. But they distinguish between God's gifts—Nature's instincts, and——" He hesitated. "Our finest writers are strong, but they show you the nobility of man's conquest over sin." He turned the poker in the fierce heat of the fire. "That kind of stuff! Do you think that strengthens the morals of any one? There are things decent-minded folk draw a veil over."

"The book made a great sensation," said Angela. "I heard of one man who carried it about with him, and wept over it. And—there are always different points of view, aren't there? It bored Flossie to tears. He went to sleep over it, I believe."

Jock looked at her with a puzzled expression in his eyes. He did not know that she was testing him; he could not understand her mood.

"I was not thinking of how a book of that sort would affect Lord Francis," he said. "It wouldn't affect him—I mean, influence him. But it would others."

Angela waited for a few minutes, and then said in a low voice:

"You are vexed with me, Jock?"

"I wish you had not read that book," he said bluntly.

"Do you think I read it because I like that kind of book?" she asked.

"You knew all about it," he said. "You must—to have understood my point of view."

"That was just it. I wanted to hear your point of view; and now that I have heard it, I would like you to hear mine."

He was about to answer, but she did not wait.

"That type of book is not peculiar. There must be a demand for it, or else the taste would not be catered

for—and it pays, of course. Money! You may be sure it pays. Jock, I read that book because—— It was curiosity made me do it! Every one was talking about it, and—— Well, I read it." She sat up; her cheeks flushed hotly. "I hated myself after I had read it. That was the feeling it gave me—hatred of myself! It seemed to me a masquerade—a horrible perverting of Nature."

She stopped and caught in her breath with a half-sob. Then suddenly, without any warning, she slipped from her seat on the sofa; and before Jock knew what she was going to do, he found her kneeling beside his chair.

"It hurt me so when you would not take my hand just now," she said. "I was sorry at the time for reading that book; but I am more sorry now than I was then." The tears brimmed up to her eyes. "I know what your love is to me," she continued in a low voice,—"what a husband's love can be. It—it's unforgivable that a girl should get the hateful idea into her head that a man's love is to be judged by the standard of a book like that!"

But Jock was still strangely unresponsive. She moved back from him, and sat down on the fender-stool. She looked at the smouldering heap in the fire.

"It was written by a woman," she said.

"I know it was. I'm sorry," said Jock. "Perhaps there's some excuse in that; she hits in the dark. A man revolts against seeing himself dissected like that. I'm sorry that women write these sort of books. They're women, and—well, I think they might give us something better."

Angela sat very still for some time. There was a cloud between them, and it hurt her.

"Jock! when are you going to take me back to your heart again?" she faltered, when she could bear his silence no longer. She had turned her face to him, and he saw that her eyelashes were wet.

"You were never out of my heart—that could not be," he said quickly.

"We were not quarrelling, were we? We were only finding out a little more about each other," she said. "Are you beginning to discover what a complicated thing a woman is?"

"If they only realised how they can make or mar us!" said Jock.

"And how you men can make or mar us," she answered quickly. "Don't forget that we are the weaker. And when we love—we never count the cost."

"I don't forget that," he replied gravely. "But we ought to get our best from you."

"It ought to be give and take," said Angela. "Like the beautiful description of Tennyson's lovers in 'The Princess.'"

Jock was looking beyond her into the red glow of the peat-sods. She saw his lips move:

> "For woman is not undeveloped man,
> But diverse: could we make her as the man,
> Sweet Love were slain: his dearest bond is this,
> Not like to like, but like in difference."

His voice rose and fell with a musical rhythm of enunciation which told that the beauty of the passage he quoted was to him a thing loved and familiar.

"You know my Princess?" cried Angela. "And oh! Jock, you never told me you had such a lovely voice."

"Isn't it my usual voice?" he asked.

"No, not a bit," she answered. "At least—oh! you know what I mean."

"I'm very fond of poetry," said Jock. "If you are a poor hand at expressing yourself, it helps you to put into words thoughts which have been in your mind, but which you have not been able to express for yourself."

"Jock, you can never say after to-night that your tongue is like a stiff key in a rusty lock," said Angela. "When you are roused you find no difficulty in expressing yourself. And—you understand poetry, too. Go on from where you stopped. That last bit in the last scene of all—I love it so."

He shook his head.

"My memory is not so good as you think." He went over to the book-shelf and came back with the volume he had quoted from in his hand. He opened it and held it out to her. "You said you did not like being read to!"

"Jock! How unkind of you to remind me of that," she answered reproachfully.

He took back the book, and sitting down beside her on the fender-stool, with the fire-glow lighting the page, he read to her that most sweet of noble lessons—of Love blended in the perfect harmony of man and wife's equality.

"The very last bit over again," whispered Angela—"where he asks her to trust him utterly":

> "My hopes and thine are one:
> Accomplish thou my manhood and thyself;
> Lay thy sweet hands in mine and trust to me."

She put out her hand hesitatingly, and laid it where it had lain before—and been rejected. But this time it was taken in his.

"Did you feel that I had failed you?" she asked. "Had I lost purity in your eyes?"

"No," he answered slowly; "that was not my feeling. I think it was because—you are my wife. Something in that—that thing that I burnt—made me feel that it was I who was lowered in your eyes."

She touched the open page.

"You don't feel like that now?"

"No," he answered. And, bending down, he kissed her on her brow.

CHAPTER XXI

ON Christmas Eve they decorated the little house together and made it look appropriately festive.

Angela stood and looked on, whilst Jock carried out her suggestions. He had twined a wreath of holly round her sickle, and was putting the finishing touches to the old eight-day clock in the hall.

"Poor thing!" said Angela. "It doesn't like these prickly bits round its chin." She laughed. "It looks so apologetically self-conscious, doesn't it? Like a man who's been growing a beard in the dark, and hurried out before he was quite sure whether it suited him or not."

Jock tucked some stems of the holly out of sight and came over to where she was standing.

"It will soon be time for us to get ready to go down to the clachan," he said.

"They have made the barn so pretty," said Angela. "I peeped in this afternoon to see the decorations, and the supper-table made me feel quite hungry. Shall I have to dance a reel? And oh! Jock, shall I have to drink whiskey?"

"You can pretend to drink some," answered Jock.

Angela glanced at the clock.

"I shall go and dress now. Shall I wear the dress I was married in? It's the prettiest white one I've got."

"Yes," said Jock, "wear your wedding-dress. And —put a blue ribbon in your hair."

Half an hour later she was standing in the hall, tucking up her skirts preparatory to walking down to the barn, where the evening's entertainment was to take place. She paused in the act of fastening a pin, and looked Jock up and down critically.

"My frock is quite pretty, but I'm not sure that it's suitable for the occasion," she said doubtfully. "You're all right! Quite as chieftainy as you were that night—the night of the tableaux when you danced the sword-dance for me; but"—she glanced at her skirts—"I ought to have a tartan sash round my waist, and a string of cairngorms round my neck, and an eagle's feather in my hair, instead of this blue ribbon."

"I like you as you are," said Jock. He wrapped her tartan plaid round her. "If they see you in this, it's quite good enough. Now! Are you ready?"

Angela gave a pirouette round on her toes.

"I believe I could dance a reel as easily as tumble off a wall," she declared. "It's all a matter of clothes—or rather the want of them. Don't look so shocked, dearest! If I had on your kilt, and heard the bag-pipes—I mean pipes—— Shall I ever remember that I must call them *the* pipes? It's such swagger of you Highlanders to claim the monopoly of words the way you do. You always talk of wearing *the* kilt and playing *the* pipes!" She gave a final twinkle of her feet and landed beside him. "Now I'm ready! Where's the lantern? Isn't it funny? We might be the people in one of those delicious old-fashioned books like 'Cranford' going out to a tea-party. This isn't a tea-party; it's my one Christmas ball, and I am going to enjoy it enormously."

She did enjoy it, and she made every one else enjoy it, too. It was in the sunny sweetness of her nature to spread joy. These Highlanders, a proud race and loyal in their pride, all fell under the spell of her charm. It was given her to win hearts, and she accepted their homage with a sweet grace which stamped her personality on all that she said and did: she was irresistible.

"For long will this day be remembered; and there is no Chief of Glenmoira who has brought such a beautiful lady to the glen before, whatever!" was the summing up of old Donald. In a long speech, which was declaimed in a strange blending of Gaelic and English, he voiced the sentiment of the assembled gathering of the clan.

"He might have called me your wife," remarked Angela afterwards. "'A beautiful lady' sounded rather promiscuous."

"I expect he thought 'lady' sounded more polite," answered Jock.

But the culminating triumph of the evening came when, after supper was over, and the speeches had been responded to, and Angela had touched with her lips the whiskey in the little silver quaich presented to her, Jock, to his unbounded astonishment, saw her step into the middle of the floor with old Donald as her partner and dance a reel!

She was quite serious and grave over it, and her little hesitations and mistakes were more telling than would have been the most practised air of proficiency.

Jock watched her. She held herself with such a pretty air of dignity, and she was full of graciousness to the old man, who felt his honour reflected in the faces of those who looked on; and he was conscious of a glow of pride mingled with a rush of bitterness.

"If I could only put her in the place where she ought to be!" was his inward thought.

"What did you think of my reel dancing?" she asked, when they were once more back in the hall and she was unpinning her skirts instead of tucking them up.

"I shall never be surprised at anything you do, after this evening," he answered.

"It wasn't bad for a first attempt, was it?" she said. "I told you it was as easy as tumbling off a wall. I made up those steps for myself. Weren't they pretty?"

Jock laughed.

"They were not steps. Do you think I wasn't watching you? But you managed very cleverly. It was a pretty fair imitation of the real thing."

"I danced as well as any one there," maintained Angela stoutly. "Why, Hamish and Donald!—they did not do any steps. They only shuffled their feet about and rubbed their backs up against each other, and then shuffled their feet again."

"You wouldn't exactly pick out Hamish and Donald as show dancers," said Jock. "Some girls are beautiful reel dancers," he added. "It's quite a sight at the Highland balls to see them. I wish I could take you to one of the gatherings, and show you what pretty dancing is."

Angela came and stood in front of him. Her chin was tilted in the air.

"If you think that telling me these things is encouraging, all I can say is that it isn't! It's very depressing! You're puffed up with Highland pride—you know you are! I'm not a Highlander, and I don't believe I will ever be able to make myself into

one. I did try so hard to-night, and you have not praised me one tiny bit. You only said—I was a pretty fair imitation of the real thing."

And then he had to tell her what he really thought of her, and the pretty things he had heard said about her as well; and she was appeased and allowed herself to be comforted.

"But you mustn't get into the way of being too husbandy, and taking things for granted," she said, as a warning. "It doesn't do wives any harm to be told nice things. Love never hurts. You mustn't forget that."

The eight-day clock began to make a soft, whirring sound somewhere in the depths of its machinery at that moment, and she looked at it.

"It is going to strike twelve," she said, in a hushed voice. "Listen! Let us count the strokes."

As the last chime sent its musical note vibrating through the low hall, Angela said softly:

"Now it is Christmas day—our first Christmas day together. Everything that this year brings round is marked liked that—the beginnings of things—together."

"Please God, I hope we will begin and end many things together in the years to come'" answered Jock.

"But no year can ever be the same as this one," she persisted gently. "Soon that old clock will chime in a New Year; but—our New Year began on our wedding-day, didn't it?" With one of her pretty impulsivenesses she raised his hand and touched it with her lips. "You have made me very happy—very happy," she repeated. "I do not believe there is a happier woman than I am in the whole world to-night."

"Say that again! It makes me so proud!" he said quickly, and a glad light leapt into his eyes.

The old clock ticked on; it was five minutes past twelve now.

"Jock, let me give you my Christmas present," said Angela. "It is really Christmas Day."

"A Christmas present," said Jock. "Have you got a Christmas present for me?"

"Wait here, and you will see."

She ran into the room beyond and came back with a small parcel in her hand.

"Now," she said, "you will see why I stole your bawbees. It was to buy you a Christmas present. Untie the string quick and take off the paper; I am so excited to see whether you will like it or not. It has been hidden in my work-basket for days. If you ever want to find out my secrets, go and look in my work-basket."

Jock unfastened the string and took out from the paper a small flat leather case. He touched the spring at the side, and it opened, and Angela's face looked up at him.

"You!" was all he said. He drew her up to the light, and studied the painted face in his hand and the real living one, and compared them again and again. "It's almost perfect," he said. "Who did it?"

"It was painted from a photograph. But you must not ask too many questions," she added hurriedly. "Be content with the fact that it is me."

"I am content," he said—"more than content." And he thanked her in the way that she expected he would.

Then he studied the miniature again.

"Whoever did it is a first-class artist," he remarked.

She blushed.

"I haven't paid for it yet," she said. "I think I'll have to go on reiving a little longer. Bawbees take

such a long time to collect. I said I would stop turning out your pockets after Christmas; but——"

Jock looked pleased.

"Yes, I think you had better go on reiving a bit longer," he said.

She laughed.

"You know you loved having your bawbees stolen. You would have missed it dreadfully if I had stopped."

He shut up the case and put it in the inside pocket of his coat. He stood undecidedly for a few moments, and then, without explaining what he was going to do, he put his arm through hers and led her into the other room. Seating himself at his writing-table, he drew her down beside him, as he had done once before.

"Are we going to sign our names again in the family Bible?" she asked.

For answer he unlocked one of the deep drawers of the writing-table, and taking out an ordinary-looking wooden box, laid it in front of her.

"Open it," he said, "and see what is inside."

"How mysterious you are!" she said. "It's a very common kind of box." And she took off the lid.

"It's a common kind of box on purpose," said Jock. "It went a journey with me not so very long ago, and the commonness of the box was its safeguard."

Her fingers were busy inside the box.

"I'm coming on something," she said. "It feels hard."

She lifted out a bundle of something wrapped in cotton wool, and carefully opened it. "Oh, Jock! How beautiful!—how beautiful!" she exclaimed. She bent over the table and gazed in astonished admiration at the exquisite rope of pearls which lay in a shimmering coil before her. "Each one is more perfect

than the other," she said, touching the beautiful things caressingly with her finger.

She glanced up into Jock's face, and a quick flash of memory brought back to her the scene in the hall at Glenmoira, when she had stood beside him under the picture of his lovely ancestress.

He knew that she understood.

"I wished then that I could have given you the pearls, as well as the dress," he said. "Do you remember that same afternoon when we were sitting together on the brown box up in the attic, and you asked me, why, if I was a Highlander, I didn't wear the kilt? And I said——"

"Yes. You said you had been south on business," she broke in quickly. "I remember!"

"I had been trying to sell these." Jock touched the rope of pearls. "I hated doing it, but I wanted—money. I had made up my mind to sell them. I left them with a man who was going to do the business for me, and—you saved them."

"I saved them! I!" exclaimed Angela.

"Yes, you saved them. Do you remember you stood in front of the picture, and you looked up at it and you touched your neck just there?" He put his hand on the place. "And you said, 'She's got beautiful pearls, and I've got no pearls—nothing but my own neck.'"

"Did I say that? It was like asking. It was horrid of me."

"I didn't think it was horrid," he said. "I only felt that they belonged to you. I couldn't have sold them after that. I made the man give them up and send them back to me." He lifted the pearls and clasped them round her neck. "They're yours now. The chief's wife has the right to wear them, hasn't she?"

And he smiled rather sadly, for he seldom made any reference to his rank or position. "I'm afraid they're not much use to you, living as we do. But they're yours now. I shall never part with them, except with your consent."

After a little while Angela unfastened the diamond heart which clasped the pearls round her neck, and making a soft bed of the cotton wool, she laid the long shining rope down gently, like a human thing which could feel the tender, protective touch of her fingers.

She leant over it. Jock could not see her face: only the pearls could look into her eyes; only they heard the inward murmur of her thanksgiving—a thanksgiving that they had been snatched from the hands of the spoiler.

"I will never, never let you be torn away from me. You are quite safe. He says that I saved you. Some day, when you are lying soft and warm on my neck, we will go and look up at the picture of the beautiful lady on the wall, and I will tell her that I saved you."

"What are you whispering about?" said Jock. "They're very fine pearls, aren't they? The man was loath to part with them. I expect he had the chance of a good deal."

"Hush! hush!" whispered Angela, and she covered up the pearls hastily. "Poor dears! they must not hear remarks like that. Where's the key, and we will lock them up again? I should love to wear them sometimes, just for the joy of the feel of them. Pearls ought to be worn, you know; they like to lie on something warm and living. But we will put them back in the meantime. Good-night, dear things."

As Jock locked the drawer and put the key in his pocket, his hand came in contact with a letter which lay there.

"I heard from Alister this evening," he said.

"Oh!" said Angela. The feeling of resentment, which the mention of Alister's name always caused, stirred within her.

"It's the first letter he has written to me since he heard of my marriage," said Jock. He looked sad and troubled.

"Jock, I hate any one who brings that look into your face," burst out Angela impulsively.

"You wouldn't hate Alister," he said. "No one ever hated him, whatever he did."

"He makes me feel horrid, all the same. What does he say about—your marriage?"

He says very little," answered Jock. "And very little about himself. That's always a bad sign."

"Jock," she exclaimed irrelevantly, "I'm so glad that I saved the pearls. I—I would like to save other things too. You know that I would give up everything in the world for you, don't you?"

He stroked her hair fondly.

"Say it after me," she pleaded. "Say, 'I would give up everything in the world for you.'"

And he repeated the words after her.

CHAPTER XXII

CHRISTMAS became a thing of the past, and the New Year broke clear and cold, with a thin newness in the bite of its sharp north wind; there came a heavy snow-storm which draped the hills and the glens in a thick mantle of white, and Angela saw her Highland home under a fresh aspect. She said she loved it so, and thought it was quite as beautiful in its dazzling whiteness, with the loch lying black and still and the snow-capped peaks glistening against the blue sky, as in the crimson and gold of its autumn beauty.

The snow did not last. It melted almost as quickly as it had fallen, and a long spell of broken and unsettled weather followed.

The days began to lengthen, but they were grey and cheerless, and the outside world was not encouraging. Angela never grumbled, although she was necessarily left for many hours by herself. Jock's work took him out in all weathers, and sometimes, when he had business to attend to at a distance, she was left for the best part of the day alone.

"I miss you dreadfully, but there is always the looking forward to your coming back," she would say cheerfully. "That first day I was left alone I did not know what to settle to; but now—I find heaps of things to do. This," and she patted her work-basket, "helps

me to pass the time. I'm becoming so domesticated. I shall soon be threading needles in my sleep."

"I can't imagine the house now without the things that seem part of you," said Jock. "I don't know what you've done to it. It's the same, and yet you've changed the look of everything."

It was the last day of February—a dull, colourless afternoon. Angela was standing by the window, and drew Jock's attention to some birds which were flying in a V-shaped line over the loch.

"Duck!" said Jock.

"You have never gone duck-shooting," she said. "Do you remember you said you would take me with you when you did?"

Jock was following the duck with his eyes.

"I might take my gun and have a stalk," he said. "A last chance of filling the larder."

"Can't you go on shooting after this?" she asked.

"Not after to-morrow. Yes, I think I'll have a try after them; but you mustn't come."

"Why not?" she said.

"It's nasty, cold work hanging about; and the ground is so wet," he said.

"I want some fresh air badly," she answered. "It has rained so, I haven't been able to get out for days."

He looked at her, and then he put his hand on her shoulder and turned her round to make her face him.

"You're losing all the pretty colour you had at harvest-time," he said. "Is it the damp? Does it make you feel slack?"

"Oh! I'm all right," she answered, trying to turn her head aside. "Do take me," she persisted. "What happens? How do you get them?"

"I generally shoot them in the evenings, waiting for flighting," he said.

"Flighting! What's flighting? It sounds romantic."

"It's when they're flying from the loch to some feeding-ground near. It's more conducive to rheumatism than romance. It means sitting behind a wall in a wet ploughed field."

"Never mind the rheumatism," said Angela. "It's beginning to get dusk now. I'm going to put on my things. Go and fetch your gun."

"I haven't made up my mind yet whether I'll take you."

"Oh, you cautious old Scotchy! If I wait until you have made up your mind, I——"

She was half-way upstairs before she had finished her sentence, and he never heard the end of it. When she came down again, ready dressed, he fixed his eyes severely on her boots.

"These are not your thickest boots," he said.

She picked out a stick from the rack, and brushing past him, escaped into the garden.

"It will be dark before we make a start," she called back; and he shouldered his gun and followed her.

But the duck-shoot was a failure. It was the first expedition of the kind which had turned out unsuccessfully; and though Jock had tried to persuade Angela not to come, he was sorry that she was disappointed. There was no flighting! Whatever spot the duck had chosen that evening for their feeding-ground was known to themselves alone. Jock changed his place several times, for he knew their haunts; but when the dusk deepened and a cold drizzle began to wrap the hills in its clammy shroud, they turned their faces homeward.

"Well, I must own that it is cold fun," said Angela. "Crouching up behind a stone wall, with your feet in a puddle, and a Scotch mist, as you poetically call rain, soaking into you, isn't exciting enough to keep you warm."

She walked very slowly, and as they went up the garden path to the front door, he noticed it, and held out his hand.

"Is your ankle tired? Shall I give you a pull?" he said; and she seemed to catch readily at the suggestion.

As he opened the door for her and the light from the hall lamp fell full on her face, he uttered a sharp exclamation.

"It's all right," she said. "I'm only so—cold."

She dropped his hand, and walking on into the room beyond the hall, she sat down rather hurriedly in his big arm-chair. He threw some fresh wood on the fire. It was dry and burst into a blaze, and the light danced on the walls and the ceiling and on Angela sitting in the big chair. She looked very small and white and fragile, but she smiled at him as he stood over her.

"I'm all right," she said.

"Your lips haven't a bit of colour in them, and your teeth are chattering," he answered. He knelt down on the rug beside her, and, taking one of her feet in his hand, began to unfasten the laces of her boots. Her boots were so wet that they clung to her stockings. "Why did you not tell me you were so cold?" he said, keen reproach in his voice. He laid down the wet boots and took off her stockings, and stretching across to the sofa picked up Christina's green cushion and, propping it against the fender-stool, made a rest for her feet.

"It will hurt it," protested Angela feebly. "The fire will scorch the satin."

He took no notice of her remonstrance, and when she spread out her chilled hands to the blaze, he took them in his and chafed them.

"How nice and warm you are!" she murmured. "Human warmth is much better than fire warmth, isn't it? I feel the circulation coming tingling back all over me."

He continued chafing her hands until the colour returned to her lips. The expression of misery in his eyes made her feel tremulously happy one moment and sorry for him the next.

"If he keeps on looking at me like that I shall cry," she told herself. And when, after a few minutes, he suggested that he should go and tell Sheila to bring in tea, she forced a smile, and watched him leave the room with a sigh of relief.

She leant back and closed her eyes.

"I hope he'll stay away for a little. I simply can't bear to see him looking at me like that. I can't bear to frighten him, and he's dreadfully frightened. What am I to do?—what ought I to do? My poor dear!"

She heard him go into the kitchen and speak to Sheila, and then she heard him go upstairs.

"He's in my room now. What can he be doing?" she wondered dreamily. The warmth was stealing over her with a sense of comfort, but she felt limp and languid and tired. Presently she heard Jock come downstairs again. He entered the room very quietly, and she saw that he was carrying her slippers and a pair of dry stockings.

"Oh, Jock!" she exclaimed.

"You're beginning to look better," he said in a voice of relief.

He arranged the slippers with their soles uppermost inside the fender, and laid the stockings on the green cushion.

"Jock, what a delicious old maid you are!" said Angela, struggling with an hysterical inclination between laughter and tears. "Who taught you to do these kind of things?"

"No one taught me," he answered. "If you're very fond of any one, that teaches you."

Sheila brought in the tea, and he poured out Angela's, and then sat down on the fender-stool and scrutinised her face anxiously.

"I shall never forgive myself if you've caught a chill," he said.

"It was my own fault," she answered. "I would not listen to you. You told me that my boots were too thin."

"That doesn't matter," he said. "If you were to get ill, I don't know what I should do. It would send me off my head, I think."

"Oh, Jock! you mustn't say such things," she remonstrated.

"Yes, it would," he answered. "I should think it was my fault for not taking care of you."

"Please, may I have some more tea?" she said, giving him her cup; and he rose and went over to the tea-table.

She shook her head at the crackling logs.

"What shall I do?" she said to herself. "Shall I keep it a secret just for a little while? Would he be angry with me if I did? It's very puzzling. I want to save him from worrying; but I want to tell him. I want

to—dreadfully badly. But if it means that he will go about with that look on his face, and fuss himself ill, perhaps I oughtn't to." A flame broke from the logs and danced merrily up the chimney. "I shall put off for a little while. It's for his own sake. It's very unselfish of me, because I want so much to tell him."

Jock returned with her tea-cup.

"Are your feet quite warm now?" he asked.

"Quite warm — they're beautifully toasted." She looked down. "Did you ever see such ridiculously useless-looking things?" she said. "Ten stupid little pink toes—like dolls' toes; they ought to be brown and hard. A real working woman would go barefoot, wouldn't she? At least, she ought to if she was genuine. Would you like to see me walking barefoot, Jock?"

"You will never walk barefoot," he answered.

"Well, I would not like the thorns," she said.

He put his hand protectingly over the ridiculous little useless things.

"God help me, they'll never walk on thorns," he said. "I would carry you from Land's End to John-o'-Groats, sooner than let one thorn pierce your dear feet."

"That's a beautiful idea," she said.

She was thoughtful for a few minutes.

"Jock," she said abruptly, "you would really like to go back to Glenmoira, wouldn't you? I mean you and I—to live there in the way that your father used to live."

"Yes," he answered, surprised at her asking such a question.

"This kind of life does not satisfy you—even with me," she persisted.

"It's not a case of being satisfied. It's a case of what I ought to be," he answered. "I am not a working man—in the sense of being a labouring man. It's all wrong."

"You're a square peg in a round hole," she said.

"Well, I'm not doing what I feel I ought to be doing," he answered. "I was brought up to the idea that I was to take my father's place after him—and I'm not doing it."

"You are doing the best you can," she said gently. "You gave up your profession; and you give your time and your brains and your strength to keeping the place together and looking after your people. That is a great deal."

"It's better than nothing. But—I would like to see Glenmoira take the position it used to take. It has been handed down to me from generation to generation, and if it had to pass from my hands into the hands of a stranger, it would be a lasting bitterness to me to feel that it had been lost during my time of stewardship."

Angela gave rather a forced little laugh.

"Jock, do you know what you ought to have done?" she said. "You ought to have married a millionairess."

"A what?" he said.

"A millionairess," she repeated. "You would have been quite a prize."

"A prize! I don't see that I would have been much of a prize."

"You're a Highland chief! There would have been a regular scramble for you if you had only given people the chance of seeing you."

"Seeing me! But I'm not good-looking."

Angela laughed.

"Oh, you dear goose! looks wouldn't matter. You would have been 'Glenmoira.' Yes, Jock, seriously—You ought to have married a millionairess. Did you never think of doing it?"

"I wish you wouldn't say things like that," he said in rather a hurt voice. "You know quite well that I would never have married a woman for the sake of her money. Where would I have been? What would I have been to her? Nothing——"

"And what are you to me?" she asked; and then answered the question for him. "Everything!"

CHAPTER XXIII

"I'm really beginning to know a great deal about farming, Jock," remarked Angela one morning. It was a week or two after the duck-shooting episode. "What a busy month March has been," she continued. "Have you got all your sowing done yet? When shall I begin to see the corn sprouting?"

"I'm afraid my being busy has made it very dull for you," said Jock. "But I'll have more time now, and the days are always getting longer. We'll have out Flora, and make some of our old expeditions again soon."

"Oh! but you mustn't waste time over me. I don't want to go—I mean, I am quite happy. I'm always so busy." She finished her sentence rather hurriedly. Jock's surprised face checked her stream of excuses.

"I thought you liked expeditions," he said. "You used to. And it wouldn't be wasting my time. I have several places that I must go to—where you could ride Flora, and I'll walk. I should like to take you."

A few days later he announced that he was going over to Glenmoira the next morning.

"You'll come too, won't you?" he said persuasively. He would like to have told her that he thought she ought to go out more, but he did not.

"We'll see what kind of a day it is," she answered evasively.

"I'd like you to come. There are several things I want to have your advice about," he persisted gently. "And there's the garden. The spring flowers will be beginning to come up. It ought to be quite pretty. Shall I tell Hamish to have Flora ready in the morning? It will give us a nice long day if we start early."

"Very well, dear," she answered meekly. She could not bear to disappoint him. "It will be easier to make an excuse to-morrow than to refuse now," was her thought.

But the next day was very wet, and Jock went to Glenmoira by himself. When he returned, he brought back with him a large basket of hot-house flowers which the gardener had cut for Angela.

"I don't believe he had any business to give them away. They belong to the Potters," said Jock. "And how did the old boy know you? He said he did."

Angela laughed.

"I made friends with him ages ago. It was the day I sprained my ankle. I had been talking to him for a long time in the garden that afternoon before I started for my walk." She buried her face amongst the flowers. "How sweet they are! Stolen!—that is why. You see, the reiving spirit comes out in every Highlander. He seemed to me a very nice gardener."

But Jock did not respond. She glanced at him; his face always betrayed him.

"Have you not had a satisfactory day?" she asked.

"I had been looking forward to taking you with me, and—oh! I always hate going over," he said in a dispirited voice. "The place and the people and—

everything seems to reproach me. That old chap who sent you these "—and he touched the flowers—" he was so pleased to get the chance of sending them to you. He grinds away at his work, and there's no one to care —no one to appreciate the result of what he does. It's the same with them all. They've no heart in their work."

Angela winced at his words. She began to arrange her flowers, and moved about the room placing and replacing the vases. When tea came in, she hovered round Jock with more than her usual tenderness. She was uneasy; she began conversations without finishing them. At one moment she was obviously on the verge of unburdening her mind of something which was weighing on it, but the post-bag was brought in earlier than usual, and caused an interruption.

Angela's share of the letters was always the larger, and after Jock had given her hers, he went over to his writing-table with his own. He moved as though he were tired. She always knew, when he sat like that, with his back turned to her, that he had received a letter from Alister.

"It is because he is afraid of what is in it, and he wants to know the best or the worst before I see his face," she said to herself.

She read her own letters and did not disturb Jock. He sat for a long time very still after he had read one particular letter, and then he read it again, and put it into his pocket, and rising, without saying anything to her, left the room. She heard him go out at the front door. It was still raining, and she knew that there was nothing urgent to take him out at that hour, and he did not return until nearly dinner-time.

At dinner he was unusually silent, and during the

remainder of the evening he avoided talking upon any but the most ordinary topics.

Angela busied herself with her work, but she watched him, and hot resentment smouldered in her breast. He was keeping something from her, and the something was to do with Alister.

Resentment burnt still hotter the next morning when she saw that the shadow of the unshared trouble still hung over him; and when he kissed her, as he always did, before he went out to his morning's work, he looked at her with a dumb appeal for sympathy in his eyes which made her heart ache.

"Why won't he tell me what it is?" she asked herself helplessly, as she watched him pass through the gate and disappear round the bend of the road. "Ought I to have tried to make him speak? Does he think I don't know that he is unhappy?" She clenched her little hands and beat one against the other. "I will make him tell me. It has all to do with Alister. He is a regular vampire—sucking the very heart's blood out of my darling; and Jock is so loyal. He is trying to shield him, even from me." Her brow contracted, and her mouth set in a hard line which made it look quite unlike itself. "And if Alister were given money, it would be no use. Jock said that himself. If he had Glenmoira to-day, he would sell it to-morrow, and the money would run through his fingers like water! That is what Jock said." The furrow on her brow deepened. "It would be wrong to give him money. It would be wrong—I know it would be wrong."

She kept repeating the words as if to assure herself of their significance.

With an impatient sigh she threw open the window wide. The air was already full of the scent of breaking

spring; the smell of newly dug earth rose from the herbaceous border where Hamish was turning up the soil with a pronged fork. Two cock-sparrows were fighting over a feather on the garden path, and a cheeping chorus of wives were hovering round waiting to pounce on the prize if by any chance the combatants were to let it drop. A robin which she had tamed during the winter, hopped from underneath the box-hedge, where it had been rustling among some driven leaves, and lighted on the window-edge. It perked its head from side with impertinent freedom, and, making on the top of her work-basket, picked up and flew out of the window with , the wool trailing behind in the wind like a piece of Dundreary whiskers.

"Without even so much as a peep of 'thank-you!'—and I thought you loved me!" said Angela reproachfully. She looked at the sparrows, still fighting over the feather. "You are all so busy getting ready your nests. Stuck-up little things!—so full of your own importance. I can almost hear you saying 'Why are you not busy too? You are disgracefully lazy!'"

She drew a chair up to the window, and, sitting in the sweet April sunshine, she turned out all the contents of her work-basket, and then put the things neatly back again.

"The birds have taught me a lesson," she said; and her eyes were smiling now, and the hard lines about her mouth had vanished.

Lunch-time came, and Jock returned. He made a valiant effort during the meal to appear in his usual spirits—an effort which did not deceive Angela. She took no notice, and talked about garden-seeds, and how

that Hamish was very positive, and would only sow certain things in certain parts of the garden because they had been grown there from time immemorial.

After he had finished lunch, Jock turned his chair half round, facing the open door. It was a mild day, even for April, and both door and window stood open.

Angela hesitated for a moment, and then left her seat.

"Your chair is bigger than mine," she said. "It can hold two nicely, if you squash up a little."

He made room for her, and she sat down.

"How pretty the view is, looking through the open door!" she remarked. "It frames it just like a picture, doesn't it?"

"Yes," he answered.

His eyes rested on the hills he loved so well, and Angela, looking up, saw their expression, and saw the muscles about his mouth twitch.

"Jock, what is the matter?" she said. "It is no use pretending. You had bad news last night about Alister. Tell me, dear. It can't be too bad for me to know. You are here—with me—my very own. I can surely bear to hear anything if I have you. And—I want to help you."

"You cannot help me," he said brokenly.

"Tell me," she pleaded. "Perhaps I can."

He raised his head, and made as though he would put her from him, and then caught her back.

"I ought never to have married you; I ought not to have sacrificed you. That is what I have been reproaching myself with—ever since I got his letter last night. I ought to have gone on fighting alone; I should never have brought you into the trouble."

"Is it so very hopeless?" she said gently. "Tell me."

"It's the worst. I felt somehow that it was coming. He's been so quiet lately. I was afraid he'd got into some awful mess that he couldn't get out of. He's given himself away, and he's given me away." Jock spoke in a dull, heavy tone, as if he had gone over the subject so often that it had become beaten into his brain like a drearily learnt lesson.

"You mean," said Angela, "that he wants to make you keep your promise—to sell Glenmoira?"

"Yes," said Jock. "I promised my mother, you know. He says I can't break my word."

Angela drew herself up. She held her head proudly and her cheeks were very flushed.

"You will not require to break your word," she said. Her breath came and went quickly through her parted lips. Her glance wandered, as though seeking for help, and it fell on the shining sickle hanging on the wall. She put her hands on Jock's shoulders, and looked into his eyes; and he saw that she had suddenly gone very white. "Do you remember," she said, "last harvest-time, when I cut the little sheaf and gave it to you? Next harvest-time I—I will give you something else."

He stared at her, the dawn of knowledge only half-awakened.

"Don't you understand?" There was a tremulous break in the sweet voice. "If God is good, you will have a son of your own; and until you know, you can't be made to do anything. It's not breaking your word." She gave a little sob of joy and pride. "Your own son would come first—you said so. I pray with all my heart that God will let me give you a—son."

She felt his arms clasp her and tighten convulsively. She could feel his heart beating with heavy, irregular throbs, but he did not speak. He held her, as if in

fear, with a passion of strength, as though fighting an unseen something which might tear her from him. He did not caress her; his lips did not touch her; every pulse and nerve, every muscle and fibre which made up the strong virility of the man within him, was claiming her for his own. Dominating him, mastering him, was the primitive instinct that he would keep her, hold her as his, against every power, human and divine.

And she understood him. The woman within her told her what he felt. Her love was as a finger laid on the pulse of his heart.

She stirred a little.

"Dear!" she whispered. She touched him, and he shivered. She moved her head so that she could see his face, and she put her arms round his neck and kissed him. "Say something to me," she murmured. "I want to hear you speak; I want to hear you tell me that you are glad. Speak to me, dearest."

The clasp of his arms relaxed. He took her face between his hands and looked deep into her eyes.

"It makes you very happy?" he asked.

"Yes, very happy," she answered. "I thought that I could not possibly be any happier—that we were everything to each other; but this——"

She hesitated shyly, and then she began to talk to him about this, her sweet, new hope. She had been longing to share every thought with him, and now her cup of happiness was full to the brim.

But gradually a faint chill began to creep over her. Her intuitions were so quick, her power to read him so unerring, that she knew there was something—a little cloud, a little doubt.

"You have not told me yet that you are glad," she

said. "It will be such a helpless little thing at first. It will want so much love."

There was a passion of entreaty in his eyes as he searched her face with yearning eagerness.

Then she knew!

"But I will love you just the same," she cried. "I will love you more. You are not jealous, Jock? Oh, say that you are not! You will always be first—always——"

He turned his head aside.

"I know that I am a brute to be jealous. It will be such a helpless little thing; it will need you; it will want you at every turn, and you can't help giving your best—you've got the mother-instinct in you so strong. It was that made you draw me to you. You mothered me—you understood me. I did not know what it meant then; but I know—now."

She touched his cheek with her lips, mutely protesting.

"You have spoilt me," he almost sobbed—"spoilt me. I have had all your love; I never dreamt of what love could make of life until you gave yourself to me." He laid his head against her bosom. "This has been my place, and your dear arms have been mine—only mine. Everything has been mine. And now——" He half smothered her with his kisses.

Her eyes were full of tears, but she smiled through them.

"Oh those stormy caresses, Jock. They always tell me how you have been starved for love, dear. But think! You were starved of mother-love yourself. Oh yes, you were! And now—now that you know—you would not deny to your own what you hungered for yourself?"

Through the open door came the song of the birds and the hum from the bee-hives sheltering under the garden wall. The bleat of a lamb sounded from the green hill-side; in the April sky above, white fleecy clouds were racing across the blue, and fitful skiffs of wind stirred into ruffling wavelets the bosom of the loch.

Spring was everywhere. Life was astir in bird and beast and flower; an abounding hope stirred all Nature to rejoicing.

Instinctively she knew what would serve her purpose. Nature, which he loved so well, would teach him best, was her inward thought, and she said aloud:

"I—I think I am a little tired, dear."

The colour rushed up to his brow. In a moment he was alertly conscious, not of himself, but of her.

"What am I to do with you?" he asked.

She smiled.

"Nothing! Leave me to rest for a while."

"Leave you alone?" he questioned.

"Yes. I think I would like to be left alone—only for a little while."

"But—oughtn't I to be taking care of you?" There was anxious perplexity in his voice.

A trill of laughter bubbled up spontaneously to her lips. Her heart was light now.

"Do you think that I ought to be kept in a glass box, and only looked at through the lid?" she asked. "Dearest, I'm splendidly well. I only want to have time to think over all that we have been talking about. You must go out now and get all the worries blown away. Suppose you take the boat and go up the loch and look and see what the little water-hen is doing. Then you can row me up some day; I want to see her tumbling her chicks into the water."

So she sent him from her.

"I am sure that is the best thing to do," she told herself, as she watched him row past.

Jock had drawn the sofa up to the window for her before he left, and arranged her cushions comfortably: and because she saw that it pleased him to be allowed to wait upon her, she had invented a great many small wants which were quite unnecessary.

She closed her eyes with a sigh.

"I am very tired," she murmured. "But—they can't make him sell Glenmoira now. And—I won't fuss about other things. I want to do what's right—what would really help him. I wish I could talk to Flossie But—I'm too tired just now to think."

Gradually a drowsiness began to steal over her. The soft air from the open window fanned her cheek; the peaceful sounds lulled her senses to a dreamy content. When Jock returned, it was to find her sleeping quietly.

He stood for some time looking down at her. His step had made no sound, and she slept on undisturbed.

How young she looked! Child-like, with the innocence of sleep on her eyelids. The dark lashes threw their shadow on the softly rounded cheek; a smile from the sweetness of her dreams lingered about her lips. His darling! His wife! And now to be something more. The shadowy wings of the dawn of motherhood hovered near and about her, giving her into his trust with a sweeter, holier meaning.

He upbraided himself with a bitter pang of self-reproach. He had not been kind to her; he had not been generous. His miserable jealousy had hurt her. This vaunted love of his—it was a petty, small thing in comparison to hers. She had been so proudly glad

to tell him that it was in her power to help him; and he had repulsed her—cried out like a spoilt child who will not share its joys with another.

Was she only asleep? She lay so still. He bent down closer to make sure that she breathed, and she opened her eyes on him. He could see the visions of her happy dreams still lingering in their depths.

He sat down on the edge of the sofa, and laid beside her a bunch of green, the first spikes of budding spring which he had found thrusting their shoots through the sheltered slopes on the loch-side.

One glance at his face told her that she had been right to send him from her.

"I am so sorry that I made you think that I was not glad," he said humbly. "I am glad. I am not jealous any more, and I will never behave to you like that again. Will you forgive me for being so selfish as to think of myself instead of you?"

The tears gathered in her eyes so thick that she saw him but as a misty shadow, and she could not speak. Her outstretched hands spoke for her. He took them, and held them.

"You will let me help you all I can," he said.

"Yes—I will let you help me. It helps me to feel your strength. When you hold me so—I am strong."

And from that hour his love for her strengthened. The passion and ardour of the lover deepened to a tenderer, more protective love—a love which the great mother, Nature, whose nursling he was, teaches to those of her children who have heart and understanding to learn the sweet lessons of her bountiful pity and care: care for the weary and faltering feet whose steps are ever leading them nearer and nearer to the mystery of an unborn futurity.

CHAPTER XXIV

A FEW evenings later it happened that Angela opened the postbag instead of Jock.

"Nothing for me! and"—she gave a surprised exclamation—"a letter for you from Flossie. What can he be writing to you about? I have not heard from him for ages." She looked at the letter rather nervously, as she handed it to Jock.

"Your Flossie writing to me: that's rather odd." Jock glanced at the stamp. "He's in America. I wonder——" Then he stopped. He broke the seal and read the letter. He looked up and met Angela's eyes. "It's about Alister," he said. "He's met him."

Angela gave a sigh; it sounded almost like a sigh of relief.

"Well?" was all she said. She could not quite read the expression on Jock's face; it puzzled her.

"Your Flossie can speak the truth very plainly," he said slowly.

Angela nodded.

"I know he can. Has he said things to hurt you? He would not do it intentionally. Flossie's dreadfully tender-hearted really."

"He more or less tells me that I am being made a fool of," said Jock.

"How? Where has he met Alister? What has he found out?"

"He met Alister at some races. Alister was riding the man's horse that Flossie was staying with, and—there was a row about it—and——" Jock broke off, and a disgusted expression crossed his face. "It's so sickening always hearing the same kind of thing——"

"Jock dear, don't tell me that Flossie has only written to tell you some disgraceful story," said Angela quickly. "He would never do that; and he is so sensible he would never make trouble. He wants to help you."

"Yes, I think he wants to help me; but——" Jock picked up Flossie's letter. "He tells first how he met Alister. You know that."

"Yes. Well?" said Angela.

"He goes on to say that he hopes I'll understand his motive in writing. That he thinks I ought to know the kind of life Alister is leading—for my own sake. That he has got into the hands of a crew of swindlers who think he has the control of money through me. That he has led them to believe that he has prospects, and that they'll stick to him like leeches so long as they think they can get anything out of him, and that they'll keep him going. He's worth keeping, you see. That's the crux of the whole thing. He mustn't get money. Instead of helping him, I'm doing him harm. So your Flossie puts it. If I want to make anything of him, I must starve him out. These scoundrels will drop him soon enough if they find he's no use to them."

"It would make him work, if he knew he wasn't going to be helped," said Angela, as Jock paused.

"Work—yes! But that's just it," said Jock despairingly. "He doesn't understand the meaning of the

word 'work.'" He sat staring at the pattern of the carpet in front of him.

"You are not offended with Flossie, are you?" said Angela anxiously.

"No, I'm not offended," answered Jock. He hesitated. "It has been on my mind that I ought to have gone out and seen for myself what Alister was doing?"

"But you won't go now?—now that you are married, and now that—— Oh, Jock, you couldn't go and leave me! You don't mean that, surely?" Her eyes were wide and startled—a frightened appeal in them.

"No, no, dear," he answered, quick to take alarm. "I won't leave you, I promise! But I have not answered that last letter of Alister's yet, and—I don't know what to do."

"Has not Flossie helped you?" she said. "You know now what is the real truth. Won't you take his advice?"

"For the life of me I don't know. I don't know whether I should or not," answered Jock.

Angela bent forward and spoke eagerly.

"Dearest, don't think me horrid and unsympathetic. It is hard for you, after all that you have done, to find that it has been no use; but do try Flossie's advice. It can't do any harm to try it, can it? I so hate to see you worried, and it worries me; and you don't want that, do you? Wouldn't it be better to get the matter off your mind—now—to-night? Take Flossie's advice, and write to Alister. You need not say who has told you, but you can let him understand that you know all about everything. And that—well, that now you can't be responsible for him; that you have other responsibilities. Dearest! You don't belong to yourself now You belong to me, and—to——"

"Yes," answered Jock hesitatingly, "I know. But, am I right to throw him over altogether?"

"Doesn't Flossie say that that is the crux of the whole matter?" answered Angela. "That you are doing more harm than good by helping him? That Alister must be made to work—to depend on himself? That it is the only way to make anything of him."

They talked for long, Angela pleading for a trial of Flossie's advice, Jock doubtful and hesitating. But it ended in Jock writing the letter in the way Angela wished it to be written.

"I've done it," he said, coming over to where she was sitting. He stood, looking down at her with troubled eyes. "But I'm not sure that I've done right. He's not the sort to cast adrift."

"You're doing it for the best," she answered. "And then, Jock, think of Glenmoira."

He sat down beside her, and, taking her hand in his, looked at her steadily.

"It doesn't mean that we will be able to go back to Glenmoira, dear. Do you understand? I'm so crippled, the place is so burdened, that I don't believe we'll ever be able to do that."

"Something—might happen," she said.

He shook his head.

"It would take a lifetime to clear the place—to bring it back to what it was."

"But——" She checked herself, and sat silent.

"Did Flossie not send any message to me?" she asked, after a pause.

"Yes—I forgot; there was a message. He sent his love and said you need not write to him because he did not know where his wanderings might take him. He said that he would perhaps pay you a surprise visit some day."

"I suppose that means that he will be coming up to stay with the Potters in the autumn?" said Angela.

"I suppose so," answered Jock.

And April merged its budding strength into May, and the May-blossoms broke and flung their sweetness broadcast; and the fresh tints of early June began to paint the landscape with a fairy-like beauty of grace and colour. The tender green of the silver birch and the bronze of the young oak-shoots mingled their foliage in soft harmony; and along the sheltered banks of the loch-side the ferns uncurled their crumpled balls of frond to the sun.

Those June days were happy days for Angela, and she spent most of them on the loch. She loved to watch the varying effects of light and colour, and the restful motion of the boat and the rhythmical dip of the oars soothed her indescribably. As its prow gently cut the water, the soft Highland air fanned her cheek, and the song of the birds made music from the banks; and Jock was always ready to take her wherever her fancy suggested.

If anything called him away and he had to leave her for an hour or so, he would often moor the boat to an overhanging branch in some sheltered nook and leave Dileas behind on guard.

"What would he do if anything happened?" Angela asked one day. "If the boat were to drift, would he swim after me?"

"He'd give tongue," Jock had answered, patting the dog's head. "He knows quite well that when he's left with you, he has to look after you. I can trust him."

Dileas raised his eyes at the approving tone of the loved voice.

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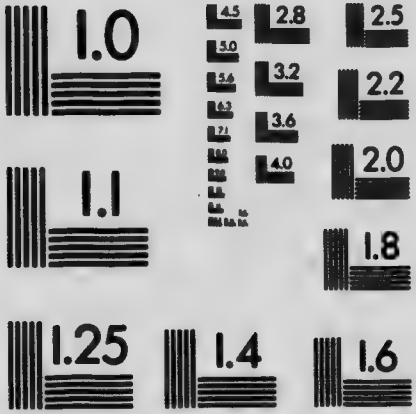

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"Yes, I know that I am here on trust, and I shall be faithful to my name," he answered dumbly.

Angela had not the actual satisfaction of seeing the water-hen tumbling her chicks into the water; but one day she saw her swimming proudly out from the bank with four little balls of brown fluff paddling round her.

"How I should love to catch them and cuddle them!" she cried, eagerly stretching out her hands over the side of the boat. "Do let me try! Row in nearer, Jock!"

"You would be clever if you managed to catch them," answered Jock. "She'd never let you. There! she's off."

And with a sharp quack, and a jerk of her tail, which showed the glint of the white feathers underneath the brown, the little mother hurried her darlings out of reach of the eager hands and hid them in the cover of the sheltering reeds.

One afternoon, when June was in its prime, they had returned from an expedition on the loch. It was close upon five o'clock. Jock had stopped behind at the landing-stage to put up the boat, and Angela had walked on in advance.

She turned the bend of the road from the boat-house, and saw to her surprise that a pony-cart, with the pony tied to the fence opposite, was standing by the white gate leading up to the house. It was a shabby-looking concern. The cart looked as though it had not been cleaned for weeks; and the pony was an ungroomed little creature, evidently taken rough from the hill-side.

She stopped and stared at it. Who could the visitor be? Some one who was either in the house or on the premises. She glanced round apprehensively, and then a sudden hope flashed into her mind. Flossie! It

could be no one but Flossie. He had said he would pay her a surprise visit, and nothing had been heard of him since he had written to Jock about Alister. Of course it was Flossie. She pushed open the gate and hurried up the pathway, breathless with anticipation.

Then her step slackened. The front door stood wide open, and she heard the tinkle of tea-cups. He had probably been waiting for hours, and Sheila had, of course, given him tea.

A smothered laugh bubbled up to her lips. She could not resist the temptation of taking him unawares, and noiselessly she crept close to the door and peeped into the hall. The blinds had been lowered for the sun, and she could not see very distinctly. Some one was sitting in Jock's chair, which had its high back turned towards her, but she could see the table, and she caught sight of an egg-cup, and there was a large plate of what looked like salad with a row of little red radishes arranged round the edge.

The figure in the chair was invisible, all except the top of a hat. It was a man's hat—a shabby green Tyrolean, very much squashed down about the brim.

"I shall take care to tell him that living in the wilds has not improved his manners," she murmured. "Sitting down to tea with his hat on! Such a hat!"

The figure stretched out a hand and picked out a radish from the dish. The hand was not Flossie's, and Angela almost screamed as the figure turned sideways and flicked a drop of moisture from the tail of the radish on to the floor.

That nose! That brown-paper-tinted complexion!

"Oh goodness!" ejaculated Angela, and, falling back a step, she dropped a book she had been carrying on the doorstep.

Lady Di revolved slowly on her seat; then she rose, and stood with one hand on the table and the other feeling for her eyeglasses. She put them on and fixed Angela with a searching stare.

Angela was too petrified by astonishment to do anything but stare back. Lady Di smiled—a smile which dawned slowly and painfully, like the gleam of winter sunshine on dry fields after a black frost.

"Well!" she said, advancing a step. "You're surprised. I've kept my word, you see. I told you in my letter that if I came north for some fishing, I'd look you up."

Angela was limply preparing to take the hand held out to her, when Lady Di stooped and, making a peck at her face, kissed her on her cheek.

"I haven't done that since Edwin died," she remarked grimly; then she added, "I never had a child of my own, but that's no reason why I shouldn't have a mother's feelings. I've always said I was prepared to act the part of a mother to you, Angela—I've said so repeatedly."

Angela murmured something unintelligible. Lady Di warmed to her subject.

"I never approved, as you know, of your father leaving you to the care of that flipperty-gibbet Flossie. Many a time I have told Flossie that I don't approve of him, and I shall consider it my duty to keep on telling him so, whenever there's occasion."

Angela felt a prickly sensation creeping over her—she always did when she heard Flossie maligned by Lady Di. She held herself silent with an effort.

Lady Di continued complacently:

"I said to myself when I found that I was within a day's drive of you, 'It's my duty to go and see Angela.'"

She put up her eye-glasses again and almost beamed through them at her victim. "I'm very glad that I did come. My dear Angela, you may treat me with complete confidence."

"Oh! what shall I do with her?" murmured Angela faintly. She rallied desperately. "It was very kind of you to come and see me—us, I mean. I'm so sorry we were out and you had to wait. Jock will be in directly. Please go on with your tea. I am so glad you did not wait for us. I hope Sheila has given you everything that you like?"

"Thank you! I asked for what I wanted," said Lady Di. "You grow excellent radishes. I should like to have a bunch to take back with me if you have any to spare? I'm stopping at the inn, and hired the inn pony to bring me over. The slowest beast and the most ramshackle machine to be found north of the Tweed, I should imagine." Her eyes fixed themselves on the salad-dish. "Yes, I shouldn't mind taking a bunch of radishes back with me."

A shadow crossed the window.

"Jock! Now what will happen?" and Angela looked imploringly at Jock as he entered.

Whatever of a surprise it was to Jock to find Lady Di in possession of his house and making herself very much at home in it, he greeted his guest with a courteous hospitality which Angela felt was a mute reproach to herself. She had never seen him entertain any one in his own house before. She watched him with an odd, new sense of pride. He understood his duties of host very well.

"It would not matter who it was, he would be just the same. And it does not seem to occur to him that it is the least beneath his dignity to go and fetch things

that most men would ring the bell for," she said to herself.

Lady Di looked with approval on Jock; his quiet movements and the way in which he paid her small attentions gratified her. Angela soliloquised to herself as she looked on and watched.

"She likes him. She likes men a great deal better than women. They're talking about fishing now—flies and casts, and things she understands better than a mother's feelings. Oh dear! I hope she'll keep on talking about subjects like that."

Lady Di was chipping the top off her second egg. She was feeling very much at home, and looking round, remarked patronisingly:

"You've got a nice little place here."

Jock smiled.

"It's very small," he said. And added politely: "So small that we are denied the pleasure of inviting a guest to stay with us."

Lady Di helped herself to salt, and began to work it slowly and gently into the yolk of her egg.

"It served your time as a bachelor very well, I expect," she said. "But when you move back into the other house, what will you do with this one?"

Angela hastily caught up the dish of radishes and held it forward.

Lady Di waved it aside.

"Not until I've finished my egg, thank you." And she continued her conversation where she had left off.

"When you make your move, I wouldn't mind taking this place off your hands," she said, addressing Jock pointedly. "Would you let some fishing with it?"

Angela still held forward the dish of radishes insinuatingly.

"Those little round ones are so crisp," she said, with pressing hospitality.

Lady Di helped herself to a radish absently. She was preoccupied with her subject, and was waiting for Jock to reply to her question.

"Well?" she said interrogatively.

Jock made some rather vague answer which committed him to nothing.

But if there was the chance of getting what she wanted by persistency, Lady Di never allowed a subject to drop. She still continued to address Jock.

"What do you think of my suggestion? I would make a very good tenant. And of course you'll be moving out of this as soon as Monty Potter's time's up."

"Jock, we want some more hot water," interrupted Angela.

"I filled up the tea-pot only a few minutes ago," answered Jock, looking at her in surprise.

"It's cream, then—there's no cream. I knew I wanted something."

She thrust the cream-jug into his hand, and he went away with it obediently.

Lady Di smiled her dry, wintry smile.

"How rustic! Has he gone to milk the cow? This kind of playing at love in a cottage is very pretty. What do you do? Wash up the dishes and make the beds?" She leant forward and planted her hands on her knees, which was her favourite attitude when she meant to be emphatic. She nodded in the direction of the door through which Jock had disappeared.

"Angela! I think you've made a wise choice; though I must say when I first heard of it I thought you were marrying a pig in a poke, for no one knew

much about him, except that he was saving." She nodded again. "I should like to tell him that I'm satisfied, and think that he'll make you a good husband, and that he can be trusted to——"

"Please don't do anything of the kind," broke in Angela. "He would not like it. He is dreadfully particular. Scotch people—Highlanders—are——"

Jock was heard returning.

"Please don't make personal remarks, and please don't say anything more about renting the house," she whispered breathlessly as Jock re-entered with the cream-jug.

Lady Di sniffed, and helped herself to honey.

"I suppose you've heard of Beauty's engagement?" she remarked, after a few moments' pause.

"No," said Angela.

"Well, it's just out. He's found an heiress at last. She's quite hideous and very stupid." She chuckled, and blinked her eyes at Angela. "He'd have done better for himself if he'd managed to——"

"Oh, the honey's dropping off your scone!" exclaimed Angela. She rose hastily. "I'm afraid it's gone on your dress. Do let me mop it up for you. Honey is such a sticky, messy thing."

"I didn't see it drop," said Lady Di. "I'd better eat up the scone, and then it's safe."

Before she had finished her scone, Angela had started a fresh topic.

"How is Dolly?" she asked. "I haven't heard from her for ages."

"Dolly! I've no patience with Dolly. A poor thing! She hasn't the pluck of a chicken, or she would have got rid of that objectionable creature, Monty Potter, before now." Lady Di pushed back her plate.

She glanced at Jock, and then at Angela. "I wouldn't mind betting that we'll see the end of *that* before long." She fixed Jock with her eye-glass. "I shouldn't wonder if your tenant didn't turn up for the twelfth, or for any of the shooting, this season."

Jock looked surprised, but said nothing.

"I didn't ask questions, but I fancy he'll have other fish to fry," said Lady Di oracularly. She wagged her head at Jock solemnly. "I don't suppose you're sorry that this is his last season. I hope he's paid you a good rent; but, of course, you'll be glad to get things back into your own hands now, and Angela will—— No, Angela, that's not my pocket-handkerchief. I never drop my pocket-handkerchief about on the floor. It's your own."

"So it is," murmured Angela.

Angela raised a flushed face to Jock.

"Jock, don't you think Lady Di would like to go out and see the garden? We might pick her some flowers."

"Flowers! No, I don't think I've much use for flowers," said Lady Di, rising slowly. "I'm staying at the inn, and I'm off the day after to-morrow. But—I shouldn't mind a bunch of radishes. If they were wrapped up in a cabbage leaf I could put them in my pocket. It's time I was going." She glanced at the clock. "That beast that I'm driving has only one pace. It crawls up hills and walks on the flat."

Jock would not let Angela go down to the gate to see Lady Di off.

"I think I'd better," she said nervously, in an undertone.

"No," he answered; "you are tired. I'll see her off, and we'll pick the radishes on the way through the garden."

Angela watched the two figures go down the garden path, Lady Di marching on in front, talking in strident tones to Jock over her shoulder. It was all about radishes.

"Thank goodness! When she's off on one of her hobbies, she runs it to death," she said; and she went back into the house, and taking off her hat, put up her hands to her hot forehead.

"Oh, what a strain it has been! She was dreadful. She hasn't a grain of tact. I do hope no more people will come and look us up. I don't want to be looked up. I want to be left alone. I don't want any one except my dear Bawbee." She sighed. "I don't believe I even want Flossie."

CHAPTER XXV

JOCK seemed to be a very long time in seeing his guest off. It appeared to Angela to be an unnecessarily long time. She did not rest, but went and stood by the window of the sitting-room. It commanded a better view of the gate than the hall.

Through the holly-arch she caught a glimpse of Lady Di standing by the pony-cart. It was evident that she was doing all the talking, for Jock stood in a listening attitude—Angela knew that by the way he held his head down.

"What can she be saying to him? How I wish she had not come!" she sighed impatiently.

At last she saw Lady Di get into the pony-cart. Jock helped her in, and she shook his hand impressively at parting, as though she were giving him a last injunction; then gathering up the reins, she poked the pony's hind-quarters with the butt end of a broken whip, and the cart jingled out of sight.

Angela listened to the sound of the retreating wheels; she heard the gate click as it swung-to, and she saw Jock coming up the pathway.

He walked very slowly and still held his head down. She heard him come into the hall, and he called her name.

"I'm here," she answered.

He entered the room, and coming over to where she was standing, put both hands on her shoulders and looked at her searchingly.

There was a pained expression on his face and he did not seem to know what to say. The colour flamed up into her cheeks and then died suddenly away again. She swayed a little, and he caught her in his arms, and carrying her over to the sofa, laid her down on it.

"I'm all right," she said, struggling to sit upright.

"You must lie still," he answered, and he forced her gently back.

She allowed her head to fall on the cushion, but she was still only for a moment.

"I was tired," she said. "Lady Di tired me. What was she talking to you about, down at the gate just now?"

"She was saying that she thought it was her duty to—to open my eyes about you," said Jock.

"About—me?" Angela's voice barely rose above a whisper.

"She told me that I was an ignorant boy, and—that I'd no business to have a wife," blurted out Jock.

"Was it that?—was she talking about that all the time?" asked Angela.

"Yes," said Jock. "She said she felt that it was her duty to speak to me. That you were very young, and that she had always had the feelings of a——"

"A mother! Oh, Jock, dearest!"

A peal of laughter interrupted Jock's explanation. But he had not finished his say, and he plodded on valiantly.

"She said she would be very glad to help me with her advice, and she asked me what I was going to

do with you? And how long I was going to keep you in this God-forsaken place? I suppose I said something stupid, for it was after then that she told me that I was an ignorant boy, and had no business to have a wife."

Angela buried her face in the sofa cushions and went off into fresh peals of laughter.

"But she meant to be kind, dear," remonstrated Jock.

Angela sat up and wiped her eyes.

"It's very funny," she said. "Dearest! do take that scared look off your face. Forget all about it. Perhaps she did mean to be kind; but I think it was very interfering of her to call you names, and tell you that you didn't know how to take care of me. Such nonsense!"

"But she's put me in an awful fright," said Jock. "She really has opened my eyes."

"Then shut them up again," said Angela.

But Jock was not to be put off lightly.

"She says I mustn't keep you up here. That it's too isolated, and—so it is," he said.

"Make me go away from Glenmoira!" cried Angela indignantly. "I won't go!" Her lip quivered and she looked at him imploringly. "Don't take me away from the place I love so well. Where would I be better that here? And I have you to take care of me. What else do I want?"

Jock rubbed his forehead. He was very much perplexed.

"That's it," he said. "I'm just what she said—an ignorant boy. You ought to have some one who—who really would be like a mother to you."

Angela reflected. She sighed and laid her head down again.

"I know," she said meekly. "I've been wondering—— But—I didn't like to make a fuss and worry you."

"Worry me! As if that mattered."

She lay quiet for some time, and then she said plaintively:

"We're both very relationless, aren't we! It's a good thing to be relationless, perhaps, when you don't want to be bothered with people; but it has its disadvantages. We want some nice, kind sort of Mother-Bunch just now, don't we?" She lay quiet a little longer. "Let us both shut our eyes, and think hard together at the same time, and perhaps it will bring an inspiration," she suggested presently.

So, like two children, hand clasped in hand, they waited for their inspiration. It must have come to them both simultaneously; for Angela opened her eyes suddenly and said "Christina!" and Jock echoed "Christina!" after her so quickly that he must have been going to say it of his own accord.

"What a pair of sillies we were not to think of Christina before!" exclaimed Angela. "She's not exactly a Mother-Bunch, but she's—she's just Christina." She nestled back contentedly against the cushion which Christina's own fingers had worked. "Perhaps some good has come out of Lady Di's visit, after all," she said. "It's settled Christina."

By a strange coincidence it transpired that Christina had been thinking, just about that time, of taking a few days' holiday. She had had a busy winter and was a little run down, and a breath of Highland air was the one thing in the world which would set her up again, she said, when writing to her brother.

So Christina came up to Glenmoira and spent a

whole week there, and it was a very happy week. There were picnics on the loch, and teas in the manse garden, and Christina radiated the magnetism of her strong, comforting personality upon every one with whom she came in contact. When she went away she left peace and confidence and boundless hope behind her.

Jock drove her over to the station himself and saw her settled in the train. A bunch of the sweetest flowers in Angela's garden had been picked for her, and a large brown basket with folding lids, full of real country luxuries, sat on the seat beside her.

"It's done me a world of good, this breath of my native air," she said to Jock, who stood on the footboard, waiting for the train to start. "There's no such air to be found in all the length and breadth of Scotland as in our own glens," she added, with a smile of pride.

"Then you really think she couldn't be better anywhere else than here?" asked Jock earnestly.

"Sure? Of course I'm sure," was the confident answer. "She's as well and happy as the days are long."

"And you'll take care of her for me, Christina? You won't let anything stand in the way?"

"Don't you worry, dearie," answered Christina, her tongue slipping into the old childish tone of affection that brought back the days of his boyhood. "I won't fail you. I'll come up here and have my bit holiday first, and then she's to come back with me, and I'll take care of her for you! Isn't it the very best of everything that she'll be getting?" Christina smiled, and the deep-set grey eyes, which had such a shrewd, kindly light in them, looked into his reassuringly. "Don't fash

yourself, dearie. There's the whistle. Now see and don't get carried away on the footboard."

But Jock remained on the footboard, and held Christina's hand until the train had crawled out of the station. Then he jumped off, and stood by the side of the rail, and waved his blue bonnet, and watched the train until it was out of sight.

CHAPTER XXVI

CHRISTINA'S bunch of sweet flowers had been picked with great care by Angela herself. She had developed a great interest in her garden.

"Considering that I have never had a garden before, not a real country one, I think it is very clever of me to know the names of so many of the flowers," she was wont to remark to Jock.

The summer was creeping on. It was the beginning of August now—the time of all seasons, perhaps, when a Scotch garden is at its most luxurious stage of bloom and colour.

One afternoon Jock found Angela with a spade, looking very hot and flushed, digging up a giant poppy in the herbaceous border.

He took the spade away from her with an exclamation of anger.

"That arrogant thing is taking up all the room to itself, and squashing out some dear little flowers that can't push for themselves," she said in defence. "Look! And they are so sweet; and I hate poppies—they smell horrid. Hamish won't dig them up because he says they've always grown there."

"If I find you with a spade in your hand again, I shall tie you up in the house when I'm not about to look after you," said Jock wrathfully.

Her mouth drooped.

"I want to do such heaps of things," she said. "That's the worst of having a busy mind."

Jock shouldered the spade.

"Tell me what you want done. I'll dig up anything you like, but you're not to touch a spade again." He took her hands and looked at them. "And you've been grubbing in the ground, too. Angela!"

"Don't you like to see my fingers nice and grubby like that?" she asked. "They look so useful."

"That's not the use they're meant for," he said. "You must go and wash them, and then you can bring your work out and sit under the cherry tree and look on, and tell me what you want done."

He had made a seat for her under an old cherry tree at the top of the garden, and she spent a great deal of her time there.

She took her scolding about the spade penitently, and went and washed her hands, and came back with her work-basket and settled herself down to work. The work-basket was always very full now; sometimes the lid would hardly close: the birds could rebuke her no longer for lack of industry.

She threaded her needle and put on her thimble. Jock stood for a few minutes and watched her. It was a very hot afternoon; the August sun was blazing down in its full strength. Whilst she had been indoors he had dug up the offending poppy, and was waiting to see what she required of him next.

"I like to see your hands doing that kind of work," he said.

Angela laughed, a pleased, happy laugh.

"I really do sew nicely, don't I? Look! You almost want a microscope to see the stitches."

Jock touched with a cautious finger what she held up to him.

"You mustn't hurt your eyes," he said. "I would rather buy everything for you than let you do that."

"Buy!" she echoed indignantly. "As if you could buy anything so pretty as that"; and she smoothed out the scrap of cambric and lace lovingly.

"Aren't you going to do any more work?" she said. "All those sweet peas want tying back, and that sprawling briar catches my skirt every time I pass it."

Jock took off his coat, and hung it over the back of the seat.

"It's baking hot out there," he said.

He had not tied back more than half the sweet peas before she called him.

"But I'm not finished," he remonstrated.

"Never mind; I want you."

She made him sit down on the wooden board which her feet rested on, and searching in the pocket of the coat she was leaning against, she found his pipe and tobacco-pouch and gave it to him with the startling remark:

"I don't believe you are a genuine Highlander. You must be a changeling."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because you're so fond of working, and you always want to finish whatever you have begun."

Jock was unrolling his tobacco-pouch.

"What's that got to do with it?" he asked.

"Because your beloved Highlanders, for all their devotion and poetic love for their native land, are shockingly lazy," she said. "Do you think I haven't eyes? You would do more work in the garden in one afternoon than Hamish would in a week."

Jock went on filling his pipe. When she chose to attack him on such a vulnerable subject as his beloved Highlanders, he always took refuge in grieved silence. Presently he remarked:

"I had such an odd letter from Potter last night. I can't make him out."

"Why?" asked Angela.

"He's so uncertain. One day he writes and asks me to make arrangements for him coming up, and the next the whole thing's off. We are within a few days of the twelfth now, and from his letter last night I don't believe he intends to come up for it."

Angela laid down her work.

"You remember Lady Di's remarks about him?" she said.

Jock thought for a moment.

"Yes," he answered.

"I heard from Lady Di the other evening," said Angela. "It's that detestable woman. You know—you met her. She sat beside you at lunch that day on the moor, and tried to make you drink her cherry brandy."

"I remember," said Jock slowly.

"Oh! it's a horrid, sordid story," continued Angela, flushing. "I did not want to talk about it. I'm so sorry for Dolly, except—— Well, I suppose she'll get rid of him now. She must!"

Jock took his pipe out of his mouth, and looked at it.

"And so that's why he's not coming up?" he said. "I'm glad he has the decency to stop away," he concluded shortly.

The subject was allowed to drop. When Angela spoke again, her voice had changed. She had not

taken up her work: she was looking out across the sunny garden, away to where the bloom of the heather was purpling the hill-sides.

"Jock," she said slowly, "sometimes I am afraid of my great happiness, when I compare my life with—other women's lives. And love can be dreadfully selfish. Sometimes I am afraid that I am making an idol of my love. If anything came between us, anything that tried to take you from me, I should feel like some wild tigerish animal—I know I should. It must be wicked to feel like that." She leant over him and rested her hand on his shoulder. "People have things taken from them, just to show how helpless they are. I want to live for nothing but you. Is it right to love like that? It haunts me sometimes with a kind of foreboding."

"You are not to think thoughts like that," said Jock; "it is morbid. And it is not true to say that you are selfish. You always think of me before yourself. Do you think I don't know that?" He took her hand and gave it a little shake, and looked up into her face. "Cheer up," he said. "I won't listen to you if you're going to talk about forebodings, and depressing things like that."

She tried to smile.

"Perhaps I get silly ideas into my head," she said apologetically. "I was reading one of those funny old books in your room the other day, and it was all about presentiments, and how that oftenest just before something dreadful occurred you were happiest, and——"

"I shall lock up every book in the house, if you go trying to find such uncomfortable things to read," said Jock. "Look here," he added, rising, "there's Sheila coming out to tell us tea's ready. We'll have it here."

From the seat under the cherry tree there was a

wide view, not only of the garden, but of far beyond it. A small wicket-gate led out on to the moor at the back; and the road, which was the only means of communication with the outside world, wound irregularly across it, and could be seen for some distance at various points.

Angela had recovered her spirits. They had almost finished tea, and she had been having a little wrangle with Jock as to whether she had put sugar in his cup or not, when she looked up and said:

"Jock, isn't that Doctor Angus's dog-cart coming across the moor? Do you see? Is there any one ill at the clachan?"

"What good eyes you've got!" said Jock. "Yes, it's Angus. There's no one ill that I know of. Perhaps he's going to look up old MacPherson. He's very good friends with the manse folk."

"The people are all fond of Doctor Angus," said Angela. "I've seen him sometimes in their cottages. I always remember what Flossie said about him that time of the scarlet fever scare: that he was a grim-looking beggar, and that it would take a pretty nippy saint to slip through his fingers."

"He looks a bit grim, but he's a rare good sort," said Jock. "Too good for this place really. He had a splendid practice, and his health broke down. He's all right up here."

They had forgotten about the doctor. Jock was sitting with his back to the path which led up from the house, when Angela exclaimed suddenly:

"Why, there is Doctor Angus coming up here!"

Jock rose at once, and went to meet the tall, gaunt figure which was seen approaching. He welcomed the doctor hospitably, and brought him up to Angela.

"You have just arrived in time for tea," she said, as she shook hands with him; "and I am sure you must want it. The road looks so hot and dusty."

She liked the grim-faced doctor. The shaggy eyebrows, which looked so fierce, did not frighten her; she had seen the eyes beneath them soften with a very tender pity. They always reminded her a little of Christina's. They were deep-set and shrewd; but there was more of fire in their glow, and a strong element of dogged, fighting obstinacy.

He stood hesitatingly, and did not accept Angela's offer of tea. He looked from her face to Jock's.

"I came over to see you—on a matter of business," he said. "Can I have a few words?"

There was nothing peculiar in the request. He frequently had to apply to Jock with regard to some matter in connection with his work.

"Certainly," said Jock. "Will you come down to the house?" He glanced at Angela.

"Perhaps Doctor Angus will come back and have some tea after you have finished your talk," she said; and taking Jock's coat from the seat behind her, she held it out to him. "Put on your coat," she said.

As Jock shook himself into his coat, an odd light flashed up into the doctor's eyes. The incident was so small, and yet it held a world of meaning. Often had he felt his heart ache for Jock, living out his lonely, self-sacrificing life in an unostentatious loyalty to the people who had been entrusted to his care. And now—— It was such a small thing: a glance of understanding; a woman's soft voice saying, "Put on your coat." But it meant a new heaven and a new earth to the man.

Angela took up her work again after she had watched Jock and Doctor Angus go back into the house. Her

mood of depression had vanished; she felt very contented and happy. She possessed so strongly the gift of being able to lose herself in the interest of the moment, that the tiny garment which was taking form and meaning under the touch of her busy fingers absorbed her completely. She was unconscious of how long she had worked, when she heard Jock's step coming up the path. He was alone; and the moment she caught sight of his face, she dropped her work and rose to her feet. For one second the blood seemed to ebb from her heart and then tingle to her finger-tips. She controlled herself resolutely.

"He is there—safe before my eyes. I am not afraid." And she went forward to meet him.

It was she who spoke, for she saw that he did not know how to frame his words. She read his thoughts by the instinct of love.

"It is Alister," she said quickly.

"Yes," answered Jock.

"Is he ill?"

"Yes."

Jock answered each question mechanically. She was doing for him what he could not do for himself.

"Where is he?" asked Angela.

"Back—in this country. He worked his passage over to Liverpool. He's lying in a hospital there. One of the doctors—a friend of Angus's—found out who he was, and—Angus has come for me."

"You mean he wants you to go now—start at once?"

"Yes," answered Jock. "Alister is very ill—desperately ill. He was coming back to me." His voice grew husky and strained. "I ought never to have deserted him—I knew he could not stand alone. I—I have failed in my trust."

The look in his eyes, not of reproach to herself, but expressing so acutely his own bitter remorse, hurt her like the sharp stab of a knife. It was she who had made him desert Alister; not in words so much as in the subtlety of influence. He had done it against his better judgment, and he would not have done it if it had not been for her.

"You will have to go to him," she faltered, knowing that she must help him to put his duty before his love.

"But—I can't leave you here alone," said Jock.

"Yes, you can," she answered quietly.

"I can't," he repeated; "not unless I can get some one to stay with you."

"Does Doctor Angus say you must go at once?" she asked.

"Yes," admitted Jock.

"Then there is no time to think of anything but that. And, dear, I think it would worry me to have any one with me. You won't stay away longer than you can help?"

"I won't stay a moment longer than I can help," he answered.

"Perhaps you will find it is not so bad as they think. You may be able to bring him back. We will nurse him together, you—and I. I would help you all I could." She looked up at him bravely. "There is no other way out of it, Jock. You must go."

Still he doubted.

"Ought I to leave you?" he said.

"It is your duty to go," she answered, and her eyes did not flinch.

"Sheila is to be trusted," he said. "She would sleep in the house, of course."

She saw that he was wavering. Her heart felt like lead, but she would not let him see what she felt.

"Dearest, what harm can come to me?" she said. "This is my home, and all your own people are round me. I shall be quite safe." She put her hand through his arm, and gently drew him along with her. "You have no time to waste in words," she said. "You will have to change, and you will have to pack. Come! I will help you."

An hour later she was sitting alone in the hall, staring blankly through the open door.

Jock was gone—out of sight and hearing. Was it possible? She could still feel the clasp of his arms, still feel the touch of his last kiss on her lips.

She sat for some time in a kind of apathy—the consciousness of doubt, settling into the certainty of reality.

"I played at missing him before—that day when he left me first; but this——" She looked round her. "It's—desolation! The very abomination of desolation." And she laid her head down on the arm of Jock's big chair and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE hours passed, but on leaden feet. Angela spent a restless night, broken by fitful dreams. Her spirit must have been with Jock, for in her dreams she was haunted persistently by the continuous clatter of speeding trains, the throb of engines, the discordant shriek of steam whistles, and a pandemonium of clamour and noise.

She awoke unrefreshed. It seemed so strange to look forward to a day without the joyous anticipation of what each hour might bring forth. She had not allowed Sheila to tidy Jock's room, and it gave her a mournful pleasure to see the signs of his hurried preparations for departure lying about in it. He was always very neat and careful of his personal belongings, but the untidiness spoke so forcibly of him that it comforted her.

"He has left his real self behind him. He did not look a bit like himself when he went away in those stupid ordinary clothes like any other man," she almost sobbed, as she hung his kilt over the back of a chair. She picked up his sporran, and rubbed her cheek against the otter skin. His dirk lay on the dressing-table, just where he had thrown it down, and she would not have it moved. She took out her handkerchief and dusted the room herself, and then she locked it up and

put the key in her pocket, for no reason except that she liked to know that it was there.

Dileas followed her wherever she went, like a shadow, and seemed to reproach her for her restlessness; until at length she was compelled, out of sheer pity, to sit down and let him lay his head on her knee.

During the long morning and up till late in the afternoon she kept saying to herself, "This time yesterday he was here." But by tea-time her courage had begun to flag, and then an unexpected interruption occurred. She was sitting under the cherry tree, for she could not bear the oppression of the house, and she was gazing longingly at the road which wound across the moor, when, turning her head at the sound of a footstep, she saw old Mr. MacPherson slowly mounting the steep incline. His kind old face brightened into a smile as she came a few steps down the path to meet him.

"How kind of you!" was her greeting. "You have heard—you know. You came to comfort me, did you not?"

"I am but an old man, yet I thought maybe it is a friend's face that you would be willing to see," he answered in his soft voice, which had the Highland lilt of sweetness so strongly marked in its tone.

So Angela was not left in sad loneliness with only her own thoughts for company. When Sheila brought out tea, she waited on the old man with tender care; and after tea was over, and they had talked for a while, she walked round the garden with him.

Mr. MacPherson's knowledge of a garden was very wide and interesting. He not only knew the name of every flower, and how it grew, but its use and place in the scheme of plant life. When in her eager way

she asked him questions, he tried to explain, and to make as clear to her as they appeared to him, some of the profound simplicities in the world of nature which surrounded them. He was a poet, a dreamer, something of a mystic; but his philosophy was beautiful in her eyes. Standing with his hands clasped behind his back, and his fine head drooped, he gazed down at the clump of modest, sweet-smelling flowers which Angela had sought to rescue from their obscurity.

"The law of unselfishness," he murmured dreamily. "Not to live for the individual, but for the Divine whole: that is the will of God." He raised his eyes, luminous and far-seeing, and fixed them on his listener's face. "Every tree, and plant, and humble flower, teaches us the lesson of Nature's generosity to God—giving in prolific generosity, in places unseen by the human eye, maybe, blooming for Him alone. Year after year, season succeeding season, the sap of life returns ungrudgingly to the hand which takes from it its richest gifts."

Angela listened with a feeling of awe to the words which fell with such simple reverence from the old man's lips.

"Will you say that first bit again?" she asked—"the bit about unselfishness."

"The law of unselfishness. Not to live for the individual, but for the Divine whole: that is the will of God," he repeated slowly.

"Thank you," she said.

She walked with him to the gate and a little way along the road, for his companionship was grateful to her; and at parting he murmured a blessing, which touched her by its fervent sincerity. But as she

returned, it was not the blessing which remained with her. It was something which made her feel restless and dissatisfied with herself—a something put into words, which had prompted her to that outburst of mistrustfulness the afternoon before, when she had sat with Jock under the cherry tree; and which had hurt her like a sharp stab of pain, when he had said, after he had heard of Alister's return, "I never ought to have deserted him. I have failed in my trust."

She returned to her seat and sat down.

"The law of unselfishness. Not to live for the individual, but for the Divine whole: that is the will of God," she repeated.

"I am living for the individual. I am making an idol of my love for Jock. I have clutched greedily at happiness. I have sacrificed everything to hold him to me. I would not share him, not one bit of him, with any one or anything. I have set love up before everything else. I would not let his eyes be opened to see anything but me, and I have used the temptation of myself to make him fail in his duty. Mine has not been true love. It has been a small, ungenerous, miserable little thing. It is not worth the name of love."

With a gesture of abandonment she covered her face with her hands, and sat shrinking into herself.

"I was as hard as a stone with him about Alister. I resented his loyalty. I grudged the smallest scrap of love being given to any one but myself. It is not a bit of credit to me that I would die for him, because it is all me. He is me!"

She sobbed unrestrainedly, and Dileas came and laid his paw on her lap, and she threw her arms round his neck and found some consolation in the touch of his hard, wiry coat.

"My one comfort is that I did not keep him from going. I sent him—I made him go, Dileas, didn't I?"

And Dileas lifted the other paw and laid it on her arm, and gave a sighing groan, and looked his unutterable sympathy.

That night her dreams were more troublous than they had been the night before. The window-curtains were not drawn, and a faint grey light illumined the room, and the black carved pillars of the great bed seemed to stand out from the greyness like avenging ghosts. Before the dawn broke she could stand them no longer, and, rising, she drew every curtain close and shut out every chink of light, and in the hot stuffiness of darkness she tried to sleep, but only managed to capture a few fitful snatches of restless unconsciousness.

The next morning some of her natural buoyancy returned to her. She would get a letter from Jock by the evening's post. That was something to live for. She busied herself about the house with feverish energy; she sewed fitfully at intervals and watched the clock; but long before it was time for the post-bag to arrive she went out on to the moor at the back of the garden, and, finding a place from where she could command an uninterrupted view of the road, she sat down to wait.

She had not been there for long before she noticed that Hamish and Donald were standing together at the corner of a field almost immediately below where she was sitting. Their heads were close together, and they looked as though they might be hatching a conspiracy.

Presently Hamish moved away, but Donald remained. He hovered about, glancing every now and then in the direction of where Angela was sitting, until his manner

attracted her attention, and she rose and went down the bank to speak to him.

He dragged off his bonnet and sidled up to her. It was evident that he had something on his mind, and she gave him the opportunity of unburdening it.

"What is it, Donald?" she said. "You and Hamish were talking about something. Can I help you? The master is away, you know; but if there is anything you want——"

Donald plucked at his bonnet and fixed his eyes on her face. There was a clear glow in them, which gave her a feeling of uncanniness.

"It will be of the light that we was talking," he said.

"What light?" asked Angela.

"It will be the light on the island. It will be Hamish himself that has been seeing the light."

Donald looked over his shoulder and pointed, and Angela saw that he pointed in the direction of the Burying Island.

"When—did you see the light?" she asked haltingly.

Donald sidled a little nearer to her.

"It would be last night at the darkening that Hamish did see the light on the island; and the word has gone round that there will be death to Glenmoira."

Angela shivered, although the evening was so warm.

"Does it always come true?" she asked.

"It was myself that did once see the light," said Donald, in a mysterious whisper. "I would be rowing in a poat, and there would be anither man in the poat, behint meself; and we did both see the light, and we was afraid; and it would be that same night that our chief himself lay dead in Glenmoira." Donald pointed again over his shoulder. "It is many times that the light has been seen. I could be telling you of——"

Angela stepped back.

"Oh, please don't tell me any more just now. I—— Good-night, Donald," she concluded abruptly; and, turning, she went quickly up the bank to the gate which led into the garden, and did not pause until she found herself in the house, with familiar objects round her again. She sank down on a chair, feeling weak and unstrung, and as if the smallest incident would strain her nerves beyond her control.

The evening wore on, but no post-bag arrived. All day long she had been buoyed up with the certainty that she would receive a letter from Jock. He would not fail her; he could not. Into the blankness of the unseen he had gone; but he was somewhere. He would send her a message out of the void of space which had swallowed him up.

Nine o'clock struck, and she could not stand the loneliness any longer; she sought refuge with Sheila, who was sitting by the back door knitting. Sheila's comfort was very practical.

"It will be because of the shootings that the train will be late," she said, rising and offering Angela her chair. "To-morrow will be the beginning of the shooting, and this will be a very busy day for the trains whatever."

"I forgot that to-morrow is the twelfth," said Angela; and she made Sheila bring another chair, and they sat together in the dusk and talked in low, subdued voices until the stars came out.

Angela had almost given up hope of her longed-for letter, when she heard, far away across the moor, the faint sound of wheels. It was the post-gig, and when the bag was brought to her, her fingers trembled so that she could hardly turn the key in the lock; and when

she shook out the letters, Jock's was the last to fall into her lap.

She held it, devouring it with her eyes before she opened it. She had never received a love-letter from him. His first letter was to his wife.

She read it slowly, dwelling on every word. Love for her breathed through it, but it was a very sad letter.

Alister was dead. Jock had arrived in time to see him before he died, and he had been conscious and known him. There had been a few hours of reunion, when the weak, erring brother had leant for the last time on the love which he had taxed to the uttermost, which from infancy had been his strength.

"But I failed him at the end. He was not the sort to cast adrift," wrote Jock. "He did not reproach me; he did not seem to remember. I found him as weak and helpless as a child, and he knew that he was dying. He did not seem to want anything but that I should stay with him. He seemed to have forgotten these last years of separation; he always harked back to the days when we were boys together. The last words he said were:

"'Give me your hand, Jock, to help me across'; and then he gave a kind of laugh and said, 'What a grip you've got! I'm never afraid you'll let go.'

"I did let go. He did not mean it for reproach. I think his mind was running on something in the old days, when we had been out together, and I had given him a helping hand.

"He was just a wreck, and he hadn't a penny in his pocket. The only thing he hadn't parted with was his tartan plaid. He asked me to bury him at Glenmoira, and he said, 'When you row me up the loch, Jock, wrap

me in my plaid. I've been a bad lot; but I've never sold the tartan.'"

Angela's tears were falling so fast that she could hardly see to read the last few words. They were loving words to herself. She was to remember how precious she was to him, and to take care of herself, and that he hoped to be with her again very soon. He would have to make arrangements about the carrying out of Alister's wish to be buried at Glenmoira, but he would not delay his return a moment longer than necessary.

"I can't say for certain when I shall be back, but I shall send you a wire when I know," was added in a postscript at the end.

Angela slept with her letter under her pillow that night, and kissed it at intervals during the night watches.

"Perhaps I will see him to-day," was her first waking thought; and shortly after she had finished her breakfast, Sheila appeared with a telegram. She tore it open.

"Expect me to-morrow evening by post-gig."

"To-morrow evening! She re-read the telegram. It had been sent off the night before. It was to-day that he was coming.

Her heart felt as if it would bound out of her bosom. The few bald words on that slip of pink paper filled her with a rapture of joy, and for the rest of the day she went about the house with a glad singing in her heart, but chiding herself at intervals.

"Poor Alister! I ought to be mourning for him, but then I never knew him. I can only mourn for him because of Jock."

She saw Donald and Hamish in the field again that

afternoon with their heads close together, talking mysteriously; but she did not go near them.

"It was very strange about the light," she said to herself several times. "It must have been for Alister." And whenever she looked across the loch to the bend where it swept round towards the Burying Island, she felt a little frightened.

Dinner-time came, but no post-gig.

"Will the trains be very late again to-night?" she asked Sheila anxiously.

"Maybe they will," answered Sheila. "Will you be waiting dinner for the master?" she asked presently.

"Of course I shall," answered Angela. The question seemed absurd.

But the dinner-hour passed, and there was no sound of welcome wheels. Sheila with gentle persistence tried to persuade her to eat.

"The master would not be pleased that you wait too long," she pleaded; and Angela drank the cup of soup brought to her, but would eat nothing.

Ten o'clock struck, and she was still hoping against hope. She could not sit still; she wandered in and out of the rooms, and hearing voices in the kitchen, she opened the door and looked in.

Donald and Hamish and a strange man she had never seen before were talking to Sheila at the window. The strange man was tall and dark, with a pale face and a black beard. To her excited imagination there was something sinister in his appearance.

"Sheila!" she called.

And Sheila turned, and catching sight of her mistress's white face, she made a sign to the men to go away.

"What were they talking about? Has there been an accident to the train?" demanded Angela.

"There has been no accident—no accident whatever," answered Sheila; and the calmness of her tone and her gentle manner were reassuring.

But Angela persisted:

"Who was that strange man? What was he saying to Donald and Hamish? He looked so odd."

"It will be Black Dougal," answered Sheila. "He has not quite all the senses of a man, but it is himself that gets the news before any one else in the glen. It was of the train that he was telling us. It will not arrive to-night, because it is too heavy for the hills. There has been no accident, but it will be many hours late. There has been no accident," she repeated with quiet confidence.

Angela's eyes searched Sheila's face.

"You are really telling the truth, Sheila?"

Sheila answered that she was telling the truth, and by dint of gentle persuasion she contrived to make her mistress eat something.

"It will be better for you to eat, for maybe it will not be until the morning that the master will come," she pleaded.

Angela consented to eat, but she refused to go to bed.

"Not just yet. You go, Sheila, for you must have your rest. But I shall wait up a little while longer; and Dileas is with me, so I shall be all right."

Sheila was too wise to protest. She went away, but not to sleep. And Angela, after she had gone, sat for a long time by the open window.

It was a hot, sultry night, with thunder brooding in the air. She had no reason to doubt Sheila's words, but a great load of oppression was weighing upon her spirits. Her nerves had been kept on the strain for the last four days; she had slept very little, and that only

in feverish snatches, and her imagination had been feeding on one continuous theme, and that was—herself.

She rested her head against the side of the window. It was hard, but cool to the touch.

"If something were to happen!" she murmured to herself. "If—I could never tell him—never hear him say that he forgave me?" The words seemed to be beating time to the throbbing pain in her temples.

Presently she roused herself, and crept stealthily out to the front door, afraid that her step might waken Sheila. The night was absolutely still, not a leaf stirred. The jessamine above the porch gave out a strong pungent scent; the plaintive cry of a wild bird rose from the reeds by the side of the loch. She returned to the house, and to the window where she had been sitting before, and stood irresolute until her eyes rested on Jock's writing-table. Something seemed to flash an intuitive message to her brain. She acted quickly on impulse, and the next minute found her seated in Jock's chair before the writing-table, with a sheet of paper spread out before her and a pen in her hand. She dipped the pen in the ink and began to write, hesitatingly at first, then more surely, as she bent to her task.

She wrote so rapidly that she covered the four sides of the paper in an incredibly short space of time. The tears were running down her cheeks, but she never paused to wipe them away; and she took another sheet of paper out of the stand in front of her and went on writing. Then she threw down her pen and gave a deep, sighing sob, and taking out her pocket-handkerchief, dried her wet cheeks.

"What a relief!" she said under her breath. "I hope

he'll never read it; but oh, what a relief it is to have got it off my conscience!"

She sat for a moment or two thinking. Then she lifted the lid of her work-basket and unbuttoned one of the pockets which lined the sides. It was the one where she had hidden her handkerchief with the money she had stolen from Jock to buy him a Christmas present.

The little bundle had lain there ever since. She untied the knotted ends of the handkerchief, and folding up the sheets of paper into a tight packet, she thrust them in amongst the jingling coins; and knotting up the handkerchief again, she put it back in its hiding-place.

"What a relief!" she repeated. "Whether it's useless or not, I feel happier for having done it. I believe I could go to sleep now, and not dream horrors."

She glanced at the clock. It was close on midnight, and she shut the window and drew down the blind.

She carried the lamp into the hall, where Dileas was lying on the deerskin rug in front of the fireplace, and set it down on the table. The hall door stood open, and she closed it, but did not turn the key in the lock.

"He might come back sooner than we hope," she said to the old hound, who was watching her movements. She lowered the lamp and patted the dog's head. "I'm going to bed, Dileas. I'm very, very tired, and you are to watch for him." She lighted her candle and began slowly to mount the steep corkscrew stair. The candle-light threw her shadow on the wall, and she paused and spoke to it. "Poor little shadow! You're very lonely. It's very lonely being only half a shadow, isn't it?" And with a sigh she continued her way.

In her room she drew the curtains across the window, and left the door open for air.

"I can't stand you making faces at me," she said to the carved bedposts; and hardly had her head touched the pillow before she fell asleep.

Her sleep at first was the sleep of exhaustion, and then her brain began to work and she dreamt. Her dream was a jumbled tissue of inconsequences; but the events of the past few days were woven into it. The guiding wheel of balance slumbered; the demon of unbridled imagination ruled supreme.

She was in a boat on the loch, and she was trying to fly from the light on the island, and the boat would not move; and the man who was rowing it was Black Dougal—a harmless creature in reality, but in her dream he was a phantom endowed with a malignant personality.

"Row!—row faster!" she cried. "Take me away from the light; I am frightened."

But the phantom only fixed her with his glassy eyes, and his oars did not seem to stir a ripple on the dark surface of the water. She looked back fearfully, and she saw that the light was following. It was dancing and flickering: now it was close behind her—now it was touching her shoulder.

With a cry of terror on her lips she awoke.

"Jock! Save me!"

A lamp, which had been shaded by a guarding hand, was put hastily down.

"My darling!" rang out a voice in answer to her cry; and she was in the shelter of Jock's arms, sobbing out her terror in a wild incoherence of love and gladness on his breast.

CHAPTER XXVIII

JOCK'S explanation as to how he came to return home in the middle of the night was very simple. Black Dougal's story turned out to have been correct. The engine of the train had broken down on a steep gradient and its passengers stranded at a wayside station until a fresh engine could be procured from the distant junction.

But Jock had not waited for the relief engine. He had started to walk across the hills to Glenmoira. It was not so very far in a direct line, and to any one who knew the country as well as he did, there were no impossibilities in the way.

During the day which followed his return, there was something pathetic in Angela's eagerness to enter into his feelings, her endeavours to comfort him and care for him. It grieved her bitterly to see how tired and downcast he looked.

"I've hardly had my clothes off since I left. I haven't had much sleep," he explained. "It worried me to think of you being here alone, and I went straight through with what I had to do, and took the first train back. I'll feel better after—it's all over," he concluded; and Angela knew what he meant. Until Alister was laid to rest, he would not be altogether her own again. But she was not resentful; she was only full

of a great pity and love for him, a deep yearning to make him feel that she knew and understood and sympathised with his sorrow.

"I want it to be very quiet and simple," Jock said, when telling her of how he had arranged for Alister's funeral to take place. "It's not necessary to ask any one from outside. I would like our own people in Glenmoira to do all that has to be done for him."

A sultry gloom hung over the glen the day of Alister's funeral. The loch appeared to have no life in it; its surface was dull grey, and not a breath of air stirred the foliage of the weeping birches which fringed its banks. The ferns seemed to trail their fronds with mournful significance in the leaden-coloured water; no song of bird broke the stiliness: all was quiet and brooding.

Angela was sitting in the hall in semi-darkness, for Sheila had drawn the blinds. Her hands were folded on her lap and she was listening to Jock moving about in the room above.

The sad little procession was to start from the landing-stage at twelve o'clock. The coffin had been brought over the hill from the distant station the night before, and had lain during the short hours of darkness in the old boat-house by the loch-side.

It rested on trestles, and was almost covered with flowers—simple cottage flowers, the majority of them; and some loving hands who remembered the dead man only as a sunny-haired boy had lined the sides of the rough shed with heather. All the morning, since day-break, a continuous stream of humble mourners had passed in and out, and each had brought some offering of love and respect. Little of the latter years of Alister's life was known to these simple people. Death, like a

disarming foe, deals kindly with the memory of the weak and erring. It is an evil tongue which seeks to slander the sacredness of the dead, and there was nothing recalled of Alister Mackenzie's life but what had been good, and no words spoken but those of love.

When Jock came downstairs he found Angela still sitting in the semi-darkness of the hall.

"Can you do something for me?" he asked. He touched his black tie. "This isn't right. I had to cut it, and the end wants stitching."

She rose quickly, and fetched a needle and thread.

"It's so dark you can't see." And he held the blind a little back for her.

"Thank you," he said, after she had finished; but he drew her closer to the light and looked down at her. "You have tired yourself," he said. "You ought not to have stood about making that wreath. It was beautiful, and it was sweet of you to think of putting in that bit of holly from the old arch. He's passed under it many a time."

"I am glad that pleased you," she said.

"But you have tired yourself," he repeated. He touched her cheek. "You have been looking like a ghost since I came back. Did you fret when I was away? You promised not to."

"It was stupid of me, but I could not help it," she answered.

"After to-day I shall have time to take more care of you," he said.

"But it is I who ought to comfort you," she answered wistfully. "I do want to comfort you, Jock. You know that, don't you? I was not as kind as I ought to have been about—Alister."

"You have never been anything but kind to me," he answered, and he kissed her. "I must go now. Don't stay in here in the dark. It looks so dreary, and it does no good. Go and sit in the garden. I have taken out your chair, and Sheila will be near if you want anything."

He kissed her again, and told Dileas, who was prepared to follow him, that he was to stay behind and take care of his mistress.

Angela put her hand on the dog's collar.

"He knows," she said. "When you speak to him like that, he never leaves me."

She watched Jock out of sight, and Dileas followed her into the garden. Everything looked dull and listless. The flowers were drooping their heads in the sultry air; the same brooding stillness which hung over the loch brooded here also.

She did not go to her favourite haunt under the cherry tree, but turned into a side-path, and in a quiet corner she found Sheila.

Sheila rose from the bench on which she was sitting and curtsied apologetically.

"It is waiting for the poats that I was," she explained; and Angela saw that there were tears in her soft dark eyes.

"Don't go away, Sheila. Let us watch together," she said, seating herself on the bench. "The master said I was not to stay in the house; and I feel very lonely."

For some time they sat and talked. Angela encouraged Sheila to speak of Alister. The little Highland woman's love for her master—her chief—was a thing apart, an unquestioned fealty; but she had loved the younger brother also. She described him as she

remembered him. He had been such a handsome, graceful boy, the idol of his mother, the spoilt darling of the household, from his cradle upwards claiming so much more than his share; and Angela, who could read between the lines, saw how Jock had never grudged him his beauty and his popularity.

Suddenly Angela raised her head and exclaimed:

"Sheila! what is that?"

A mournful wail, like the sound of a spirit in pain, had broken the heavy stillness of the air.

"It will be the pipes playing the Lament," said Sheila.

"The Lament!" echoed Angela, in an awestruck voice.

"It will be that they have put the coffin in the poat," explained Sheila.

The wail lengthened; a long-drawn-out plaint of sadness floated to them across the water.

"It's dreadfully mournful. Is it always like that? Do they play that at all the funerals?" asked Angela.

"It will be the Lament of the Clan. It is a beautiful Lament. The name of it will be *Cumha Thigearna Ghèarrloch*."

Angela moved nearer to Sheila.

"It's so dreadfully sad. It seems to pierce through everything. Will they play that all the way to the Burying Island, and all the way back again?" she asked.

"It will not be the same Lament that they will be playing all the time," answered Sheila. "There are many beautiful Laments. It will be 'The Flowers of the Forest' that they will be playing when the poats is coming back from the burying."

"'The Flowers of the Forest.' I have heard of that,"

said Angela. "It's such a pretty name; but I expect it's dreadfully sad, too. I suppose a Lament must be sad; it wouldn't be a Lament if it was not." Her attitude changed. She leant forward and pointed. "Look! There! Just showing round the point—that black thing!"

"It will be the poat with the coffin," whispered Sheila.

Slowly, round the curve of the wooded knoll, a boat glided into view. It was black and broad-beamed, and hung low in the water, and was rowed by four of the Glenmoira men. It was bearing the body of Alister Mackenzie to its last resting-place.

"When you row me up the loch, Jock, wrap me in my plaid."

That had been his last request. The plaid was wrapped round his coffin; but almost hiding the tartan were flowers—flowers pure and white, mute symbols of forgiveness and of sins washed clean.

"How beautiful!" murmured Angela. "When I die, I should like to be put in a boat like that, and covered with flowers and rowed over the water."

Following the first boat, in a dark, winding line, came a procession of smaller boats. In the first one Angela could recognise Jock and old Mr. MacPherson and the tall, spare figure of Doctor Angus.

"Where do these boats come from?" she asked Sheila. "They are all black; I never saw them on the loch before."

"It will be only for the buryings that the black poats will be used," answered Sheila.

The dark line had now swept out into the middle of the loch, and the figures gradually grew blurred and indistinct. The sad wail of the Lament was borne back

to the listeners—sadder and more plaintive as it softened in the distance.

Then the leading boat, like a great black bird, seemed to spread its wings and disappear into space. It had vanished from sight up the arm of the loch toward the Burying Island; and one by one the other boats following it vanished in their turn.

An eerie sensation of blankness fell on the wide stretch of grey water. It was as though a ghostly procession had passed before the face of a mirror and thrown its reflection across its surface, and then melted into the void of the unknown.

"It hardly seemed real," said Angela. "How long will it be before the boats come back again?" she asked.

"It will be an hour maybe, or maybe it will be more than an hour." Sheila looked at her mistress, and said gently, "I am thinking that it is resting that you ought to be, mem."

"I can't rest in the house," said Angela. "I shall go up to the top of the garden and sit under the cherry tree."

Sheila went with her and arranged her cushions comfortably, and then returned to the house. She was within call if she was wanted.

Angela tried to rest, but could not. She was tired with a tiredness which made her nervous and apprehensive. She controlled her restlessness as well as she could, talking to Dileas, who lay at her feet.

"I wonder how much longer it will be before the boats come back. We can't see them properly from here, can we?" She gave an impatient sigh. "We will go out on to the moor, Dileas," she said. "We can get a better view from there." And Dileas

followed her through the little wicket-gate to the bank where she so often sat.

She rested her hand on the old hound's head; Dileas was such a good listener.

"This is better, isn't it? We shall be able to see them coming round the bend of the loch. Sheila said an hour perhaps. They may be back any minute now."

But Dileas was not so restful as usual. He moved from under her hand. He stretched his long, lean limbs, and prowled uneasily round her in a circle.

"What's the matter?" she said; and she tried to make him lie down on the heather beside her, but he would only squat on his haunches and gaze at her mournfully.

Her attention had strayed for a few moments. When she looked again at the loch, she saw a dark object coming slowly round the bend from the island, and then one by one the boats reappeared. At the end of the line was the big, broad-beamed one, which had borne Alister's body, returning empty of its burden.

"Dileas," she whispered, "they have left him behind—all alone on that sad little island. I wouldn't like that—to be left behind."

She raised her head and listened. Over the water came the melancholy wail of the pipes again; this time they were playing "The Flowers of the Forest."

"It's dreadfully, dreadfully sad! It's like a great gathering of people all crying together, and nothing can comfort them."

She strained her eyes to distinguish the figures in the leading boat.

Jock and Doctor Angus sat in the stern, and two men were rowing in the bow. The boats would have

to pass in front of the house on their way to the landing-stage, and she watched them form up into line, as they curved out into the centre of the loch.

"Shall we stay here, Dileas?" she said, "or shall we go down to meet him? I think we will stay here. He will know where to find us, won't he?"

She leant forward and passed her hand over her ankle. It had ached a little lately when she was tired. She was wearing her light indoor shoes, and they had high heels.

"He will scold me for coming out on the moor in these. We will cover them up," she said, and lifted a fold of her skirt to lay over her feet.

With a scream she dropped it again. Curled up in the heather, close beside her, was a greyish brown, slimy-looking object, which unwound itself with a swift, sinuous movement of its tail; a viperish little head raised itself and shot forward with a quick dart and hiss.

She struggled to her feet and fled. It was only a hundred yards or so to the wicket-gate, but the grass track was beaten smooth and slippery, and the thin shoes and the little unsteady heels were no support to her feet.

A stumble, and the weak ankle doubled under her. She made a faint rally, only to sink on her knees, and the ground seemed to rise and swallow her up. She lay quite still for a few minutes, and then tried to raise herself. Dileas came and stood over her and licked her face, and she put up her hand to keep him off, but it fell back limply. The sky was growing dark above her, and everything was rocking and swaying beneath her.

"Dileas," she murmured through her white lips "call him! Tell him—that I—— Call him, Dileas!"

The words sounded like a far-away echo in her ears. She tried to clasp her failing arms ound the dog's neck, but a cold, numb feeling of powerlessness was creeping over her limbs. Her voice trailed away into nothing; the cold had crept up and touched her heart.

Out on the loch the leading boat was drawing in to the shore. The last wail of the pipes had died away; there was no sound heard but the monotonous dip of the oars.

Jock was steering his boat. Doctor Angus, who was sitting beside him, saw him suddenly throw up his head, and he exclaimed sharply:

"What's that?"

Cutting the stillness of the sultry air, a bell-like note floated out across the water from the slope of the hill opposite. Again it rose, fuller and stronger. It was the bay of the old deerhound.

"Dileas! Do you hear? He's giving tongue!"

Jock sprang to his feet, making the boat lurch perilously, and thrusting the tiller into Doctor Angus's hand, he caught up a pair of spare oars, and slipping them into the rowlocks, had the boat's head turned and heading in for the shore with a force which nearly swept the men who had been rowing in the bow off their seats.

A few minutes; but it seemed an eternity to Jock until the boat's keel grated and he sprang out on to the bank. He looked back, and Doctor Angus nodded.

"Yes! As fast as I can follow," he said.

Dileas had given tongue again as the boat grounded, and Jock sped on, breasting the hill with fleet foot to the place where he knew he would find her. An awful fear hounded his steps, ran by his side, fled on before him.

He saw, when he was yet some way off; and the

stillness of the figure over which Dileas was standing struck a deadly chill to his heart. As he knelt down beside her, the dog pressed up to him, pleading for recognition of what he had done.

"If you could only speak!" groaned Jock; and then he saw the little shoeless foot, and the tell-tale shoe lying on the slippery track, and he knew what had happened.

As he raised her in his arms her eyes opened, and she looked at him with a frightened anguish of entreaty. Her lips moved, and a faint murmur reached his ears.

"Promise to forgive me—promise—if—*I* can't tell you that——"

Her eyes closed again, her head fell back, and she lay still and unconscious in his arms.

CHAPTER XXIX

OVER the little white house by the loch-side hovered a grey shadow of doubt and fear.

In the low-ceilinged rooms, so full of memories, haunted at every step by a sweet presence and the echoes of a joyous young voice, Jock kept watch; and in the darkened chamber above, his darling lay, fighting the grey shadow.

The fleetest foot in the glen had borne the message which had flashed across the wires to summon Christina in hot haste to Glenmoira.

"She will catch the night mail," Doctor Angus had said.

"But will she come?" Jock had asked in fear.

"Yes, she will come," the doctor had answered brusquely. But the brusqueness had been tempered by the look which accompanied the words.

And Christina had come.

In the early morning Jock had been told that she might yet arrive in time. The hours had crawled on till noon, and he had gone out to the door to listen, and in the distance he had heard the faint thud of horses' feet covering the ground rapidly, and then the rattle of wheels drawing near. A great wave of thankfulness had swelled up from his heart when Christina's firm hands had gripped his, and her eyes had

smiled hope, and her full, low voice had uttered cheering words of gladness that she was in time.

To know that she was in the house, that her kind arms were mothering his darling, gave him courage to wait and hope.

It was at the hush of dawn that the cry of a new-born child broke the stillness. It was a plaintive, feeble cry, the little life protesting against being hurried into a dark and unknown world before its time. To the man who heard it, it brought no glad rush of joyous fatherhood. It had cost her so much. Could he ever forget those long hours of agonised waiting, when he could do nothing to help her, when his own great strength seemed a mockery to him?

He was standing bare-headed in the garden, listening. The dewy fragrance of dawn was filling the air with strong, sweet scents, and the faint sounds of awakening life were beginning to stir. From the open window above, that querulous cry again smote on his ears, and a dumb protest against the justice of a law which he had never before questioned stirred within him.

Why should the suffering be all hers? He could do nothing: nothing was asked of him. He had to stand in the outer darkness, within sight and sound of that upper window. She was his. The life she had borne was his. He rebelled against his helplessness.

The minutes crept on, but no one came to him, and that feeble cry struck again and again on his ear. It seemed to him that hours must have passed, except that the light was still pale in the eastern sky, before he saw a tall, spare figure silhouetted against the sickly light of a lamp, and he heard Doctor Angus call his name from the porch.

He answered, but he did not move. He was afraid to look into the other man's face.

Doctor Angus advanced a step or two. He came close up to Jock and peered at him from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"The child's alive," he said. "It's a bit small thing—born before its time, of course; but there's nothing the matter with it—so far as I can see. You're the father of a son, you'll be proud to hear."

Jock caught his arm. The pride of fatherhood seemed to him as nothing.

"It's she," he stammered. "Is she——? Oh my God!" He broke off, his voice failing him.

Doctor Angus laid his hand on his shoulder, and there was a rough tenderness in his touch.

"There, there!" he said. "It's over, and she's come through it bravely. I feared for them both at first. But—I had Christina."

Jock stepped back and drew his hand across his forehead. The cold sweat stood out on it.

The doctor gave him a quick look. He was too well trained in the exigencies of the moment not to know that the best cure was to give him something to do. He made a movement of his hand towards the open door.

"Come in and give me a drink, will you?" he said. "You'd best have one yourself."

Jock recovered himself instantly and led the way into the house.

"When may I see her?" he asked, after he had attended to the doctor's wants.

His question was parried; after a few minutes he pressed it again.

"Not yet—not yet. She must be kept quiet," was the answer.

"But, mayn't I look at her, just for a moment—when she's asleep?" asked Jock.

"No, you mayn't," snapped the doctor testily. He gulped down his whiskey-and-water and pushed aside the tumbler. "Listen! The devil's in it that she won't sleep as long as she hears that."

The child was heard feebly wailing from the room above.

Doctor Angus frowned.

"It must be taken away from her. That crying will drive her crazy. She's all ears to listen." He looked at Jock, and said sharply, "See, here, I'll give you something to do. You must find a foster-mother for the child."

"I! How can I do that?" said Jock blankly.

Doctor Angus thought for a moment.

"Go down to the clachan and bring Hamish's wife back with you. She's a fine healthy creature, and her own child's old enough to leave. One of the neighbours will take it."

Jock picked up his bonnet.

"What am I to do if she won't come?" he asked.

"Come! She must come. Bring her!" was the conclusive answer. The doctor moved away in the direction of the staircase. He glanced back. "She'll come right enough. Isn't she one of your own people? It means life to the child—and the mother. I'll tell Sheila to fix her up in the kitchen. It's fine and handy. Sheila can do her cooking in her own cottage." He talked to himself as he went up the steep stair. "Aye! she may give life to the child, and God knows it wants it, poor bairn!"

So Jock went on his mission and took on his shoulders the first new cares of fatherhood. Hamish's wife was a

loyal soul. She obeyed without a thought of question, and, leaving her own child to a kindly neighbour's care, followed him, proud to be chosen; and the little feeble life was given into her care.

Two weary days and nights dragged out their lengthened course, and in the darkened room above, the grey shadow of doubt and fear still hovered.

"What are we fighting against? That's what I want to know," said Doctor Angus to Christina. He beckoned her to follow him from the room and stood with his back against the door, and, drawing his eyebrows together, frowned at her fiercely. "What are we fighting against?" He tapped his forehead significantly. "She's babbling queer nonsense. She's got something on her mind. What is it? It's to do with him! We daren't let him near her."

"Yes," said Christina "I can't understand it." There was a cautious movement heard in the hall below, and Christina made a warning gesture. "Have you told him that you would like to have another opinion—for your own satisfaction?" she asked in a lowered voice.

"No; I haven't."

"I think you'd best do it—now," said Christina.

When the doctor's heart was most tender, he put on his fiercest expression. He looked at his watch, and muttering something went heavily down the stairs.

A little later Christina heard him leave the house. She went out on to the landing noiselessly and listened. The space was so small that from where she stood she could look down into the hall below, and Jock was standing there. His head was raised, and the instant he caught sight of her he made a sign that he was coming up.

Christina was about to answer his sign when, from the open door behind, came the sound of a weak voice

murmuring at first, then raised in pitiful pleading. She put her finger to her lips and motioned him back.

She caught a glimpse of him as he moved away. Listlessly, and with down-drooped head, he had turned towards the door. Her heart ached for him. He was so good and patient, never complaining, eating his meals uncomfortably at odd times, sleeping where it was least trouble; his step, ever light, was now trained to a muffled noiselessness; and he seemed oblivious of the fact that he was deprived of all his accustomed comforts. All that he was conscious of was, that they would not allow him to see his darling. He was puzzled, hurt, oppressed by a dull, resentful wonder.

Once, in spite of prohibition, he had stolen into Angela's room when Christina was off guard, and the effect of his presence had been startling and disastrous. Angela had opened her eyes and seen him; and instead of the love-light which he had never looked for in vain, terror had sprung into them, and a feverish brightness had dyed her white cheeks scarlet, and she had put out her hands to ward him off.

Christina had returned at that moment and led him away. To his piteous "Why is she afraid of me?—why does she look at me like that?" she had answered:

"Dearie, dearie, it's not you. It's that she doesn't recognise you. She's feverish, and she's not herself The least bit thing excites her."

"But I'm sure she must want me," pleaded Jock.

"Never fear but that she'll want you. She'll soon be asking for you," Christina had answered. "It's only that she's feverish, that she doesn't know you."

But if the explanation failed to satisfy Jock, it failed still more to satisfy Christina herself.

There was something in Angela's excitement and

obvious fear of her husband which was unaccountable, and, as Doctor Angus said, it was queer nonsense that she babbled.

Jock's name was never off her lips, but it was distressing to listen to her pleading, her weary effort to explain some puzzle, to which her brain had lost the key.

As Jock stood at the open door, he looked out with unseeing eyes; he was fighting a new and deadlier fear, for Doctor Angus had told him before leaving the house that, with his permission, he would like to have another opinion about his patient.

Jock had assented, and the great man came, but he could do nothing. There was nothing for him to do. He expressed his confidence in Doctor Angus; and to Christina, whom he knew well, he said at parting:

"It is mostly in your hands. It is the nursing that must pull her through; and if you can't . . ."

After he had taken his departure, Doctor Angus and Christina faced each other once more on the little landing outside the darkened room. And they looked into each other's eyes, and the fighting spirit of a fighting race shone steadily in the woman's and was reflected with a fiercer glow in that of the man's.

Shoulder to shoulder they had fought many a fight before—in hospital wards, and in the homes of poverty and crime; and they girded up their strength anew.

Jock had lost count of time. It might be hours, it might be days, since the great man had come and gone. He was sitting by the open window in the room which was so full of memories of her, where every object, every trivial commonplace, reminded him of the sweet intimacy of her companionship; where her thoughts had so often gone out to him in a silence deeper than words.

It was the close of the day, that shadowy hour "'twixt the gloamin' and the murk," and he watched in a kind of dreary apathy the darkness enfolding the hills, and falling like a mother's caress on the deep, silent loch, shrouding the face of the waters in a mantle of sleep.

The crushing weight of the hourly and daily struggle with an intangible something, which eluded his grasp, was pressing upon him with an intolerable burden of depression.

Once again that day he had made an appeal to Christina to be allowed to see Angela; and Christina in bitter pain of spirit, had denied him. She had denied him with the oft-repeated promise, which he had heard so many times that he had grown to dread the asking for it:

"To-morrow, perhaps, dearie."

"To-morrow! It was always to-morrow. And the awful thought would shoot through his brain, making his heart stand still, that a day might come when there would be no to-morrow, no hope to watch and listen for, no need to ask the daily question.

The baffling consciousness of his helplessness maddened him at times. What was this elusive something which he could not grapple with—to which he could not put a meaning? During his long solitary watches he went over each small detail, every incident which had happened from the moment he had returned that night and heard Angela crying out to him from the darkness, to the time when he had found her lying half-conscious on the path, with Dileas standing over her. His brain grew dull striving to solve the problem. He had questioned Sheila, and she could throw no light on it. She had guarded her mistress as faithfully as Dileas.

But something had happened, and it was that some-

thing which was keeping the flame of fever burning in her blood. Doctor Angus did not deceive him any more successfully than did Christina. They tried to soften certain facts to him, to make them appear reasonable; but he knew that it was his presence that they feared, and the recollection of Angela's terror at the sight of him never left his thoughts. It was ever present as a ghastly mockery of his love for her.

"I ought never to have left her," was his futile regret.

Dileas, who was lying at his feet, rose and pressed his body close up against him.

"If you could only speak! You were with her all the time. If you could only tell me!"

Jock put his hand on the dog's shoulder, and Dileas reared himself up and planted his fore-paws on his chest. Jock could feel the dog's weight against the little miniature-case which he always carried about with him; and he slipped his hand into his pocket, and took it out and touched the spring, and it opened.

The light had grown so faint now that he could not see, and he lit a candle and placed it on the table beside him. He sat for long, with the miniature in the hollow of his hand, gazing at the sweet face which looked up at him, the eyes that had ever met his with the light of love in them, the lips which he had never heard utter a fretful word.

He shut the case with a sigh, and put it back in his pocket. How well he remembered the night she had given it to him! Christmas Eve! And the clock had just struck twelve. She had left him standing in the hall and run into the room where he was sitting now, and had come back holding the little parcel, and had said, laughing:

"I hid it in my work-basket. If you ever want to find out my secrets, go and look there."

He turned his head mechanically. There was her sofa, and there, within his reach, was her work-basket. He drew it towards him. He handled it tenderly, for the vision of her dear self seemed to hover over it. He could see her at work, and her pretty, quick movements. With what pride she had shown him her handiwork! He folded back the blue satin cover, and when he saw the soft heap of lace and cambric which lay beneath, he rose abruptly. Going to the window, he leant against the upraised sash and stared into the darkness.

A fierce tide of hatred swept over him at times, and he was afraid of himself. It was hatred of the child. He could not bring himself to touch it; he had only seen it as a helpless, muffled bundle, and he had recoiled from its cry as though it had been a hand striking at him out of the darkness. Sheila had pleaded timidly with him; Christina, who understood better, had looked at him with pity.

He stood for some time, fighting to gain the mastery over his feelings. At length he dragged himself back to his chair, and forced himself deliberately to touch and handle the things which he had recoiled from. He laid them aside with reverent care, and then he took up her scissors, and then her little gold thimble. The thimble was so small that it tumbled off the tip of his finger when he tried to balance it, and slipped into one of the pockets, and he began to turn out the pocket to find it.

There were some balls of wool and a scrap of tartan. She had said she was going to learn how to knit a tartan stocking. Then came a miscellaneous collection

of odds and ends, and thrust down to the bottom of the pocket he found a small white bundle. It jingled as he took it out.

Her bawbees! Her Saturday nights' reivings! How well he remembered her shaking that little white bundle in his face, and telling him that she stole his money to buy him a Christmas present. She had hidden her treasure: he had seen her do it—and then forgotten. He untied the handkerchief, and inside it he found the few sixpences and shillings, and a tightly folded packet of paper. He had not seen her put that packet of paper into her handkerchief.

Angela had said of him, that he was too much of a gentleman to pry into her correspondence, but he turned the packet over again and again. It was not a letter—it was something she had written herself. He could see, where one of the folds was open, that the writing inside was hers.

He hesitated. He yearned, with a longing that was pain, for some message, something which would bring the consciousness of her presence near to him. She was full of pretty fancies, and she had so loved to give him surprises. The paper might have to do with the miniature—his Christmas present.

The blood rushed up to his head and buzzed in his ears. It must be meant for him. He would turn back the first fold and see what it was.

He saw a name—his own name. It stood out clearly, and a throb of joy caught his breath. The paper was meant for him; he ought to read it, and he smoothed out the page. The heading was faintly written: the hand that had held the pen had faltered.

"My confession. Oh, my darling, forgive me in your heart before you read it!"

CHAPTER XXX

HER confession! To ask his forgiveness! A mist swam before his eyes; the hours of weary watching had told on even his iron strength.

Then the mist cleared, and hope sprang to life. How could there be a question of such things? Her vivid imagination had conjured up some impossible phantom. This message from her dear hand was to give him the clue to the mystery which he had been trying in vain to solve. If he only knew what the something was that had been torturing her poor weary brain, he could help her.

He raised the paper to his lips and kissed it.

"I promise," he murmured. "There is nothing I would not forgive you"; and shading his eyes from the candle's flicker, he read.

He could hear her speaking to him. Her quick, vehement little tricks of voice and manner when she was excited flashed at him from the open page. He could feel her clinging hands on his; hear her sweet appeals; see her eyes eagerly imploring.

"I have deceived you horribly; I did not mean to, I did not plan it. It all began with—Bawbee Jock. Because you were called Bawbee Jock. That was it—just a silly little joke. It's the little things that often matter most; and that was it—just Bawbee Jock. I

must have fallen in love with you because I heard you called that. You looked so lonely that time you came into the hall. You remember? The day I arrived—and Flossie and Captain de Burgh began to chaff. And—and that was the beginning. It was Bawbee Jock."

There was something written and scratched out.

"Dearest: my head is so tired and stupid that I cannot write sense. But you remember, we played roulette that night, and—I did not tell a fib; but when I lost my money you thought it meant dreadful things to me, and I let you think that. Just for fun at first, because it amused me; and then—oh then, after that, things went on so quick that I could not stop them. I could not bear the idea of losing you—and—I married you. Yes, I made you marry me. You loved me. I knew that; but you thought that I was poor and friendless, and that you were going to protect me, and love me, and work for me. And I let you think it, because I wanted to feel that it was only me, and nothing else. It was all a lie. I'm not poor. I'm—dreadfully—horribly rich. There—it's out. What will you say? What will you do? That look will come into your eyes that goes right through people, and it will shrivel me up, and you will say, 'I cannot forgive you for not trusting me.' That is what will hurt you most—that I did not trust you—that my love was not big enough to trust you. I wanted to keep you all to myself. I was jealous of everything—of my own money, and I was wickedly jealous of poor Alister. And I justified it all to myself—at least I tried to. I told myself that you loved being everything to me; and when you said that it was your greatest pride to feel that I could not do without you, then I said to myself,

I will not spoil his dream. But now—I know that it was all wrong. It was nothing but silly, selfish vanity."

There were splashes on the page.

"These are tears, dearest; but I have dried my eyes, and I must go on quick, because there are so many things to explain. You never found me out; all kinds of things seemed to happen on purpose to help me to keep my secret. When I told Flossie what I wanted to do—that I wanted to marry you without telling you the truth about myself—he scoffed at the ridiculousness of such a silly joke; and then when he found that I was in earnest, he was very angry. He said you would never forgive me. It was horrid of me, and I know I made Flossie miserable; but I told him that he could not scold me into obeying him, because I was not a little girl any longer, and I could do as I pleased. I could. He was my guardian until I was twenty-one, but after that my money was my very own—to do just what I liked with. My father made a very funny will. Flossie said he never heard of a woman being given such a free hand; that I might make ducks and drakes of it without any one being a bit the wiser. Oh, you will think me such a shameful fraud. And what made it so easy to deceive you was, that people think that I am just an ordinary kind of heiress, because Flossie never talked. He said he would not have fortune-hunters bothering him, and it's so long since my father died, and the money has been rolling itself up all these years. How I hate myself when I look back and remember my mean little deceits and the things I made you believe. I never intended to keep it up—really I didn't. And I thought you would find out. I was always going to tell you—often my conscience pricked me. That day you came back from

Glenmoira and brought me the flowers, and you were so sad and unhappy about your people, I felt I could not deceive you one moment longer; I wanted to help you so. And then the post-bag came in, and there was that letter from Alister, and I hardened my heart. Dearest, forgive me. I thought that I was doing right—that if I told you then, the money would make misery between us, because of Alister. I did not want to help him. I cannot bear to think of all the ungenerous thoughts which came into my mind. It was only when I saw your face, after Doctor Angus had told you about Alister, that I realised what I had done to you. When you said, 'I ought never to have deserted him.' That showed me myself—that my love for you had been all selfishness. I ought to have trusted you. We might have saved Alister. I do not know how, but together we could have found out a way. Dearest—my own—if you knew what these days and nights have been since you left me. I cannot sleep. I am like a poor, unhappy ghost that wants to confess a secret which will not let it rest, and it wanders and wanders and can find no one to listen to it. When will you come back to me? I count the hours, and I pray that each one will be the last; and to-night, when you did not come, I said to myself, 'Something will go snap in my brain if I cannot get the burden of this lie off my mind.' I thought of my little innocent baby, and that it should have such a deceitful mother—and——"

The writing had become faint. Jock had to bend his head to read it.

"I hope you will never see this; that I will tell you myself; but—in case——"

Something had been struck out: then a few last words.

"It began with such a little thing—only a name—Bawbee Jock."

He dropped the sheet of paper and stood up. A tumult of excitement was surging within him, hammering meanings into his brain, unlocking the floodgates of his spirit.

He threw up his arms.

"My God! Help me to help her!" he cried.

There, in the room above, her dear life was ebbing away. And it was this! this confession of her love for him, which was torturing her brain to madness. The pitifulness of it! To think that it was that! and that he had not known.

He took a step forward, and stood with his arms upstretched. His lips moved; he spoke, not in murmured incoherence, but articulating with tense concentration of force and will.

"My darling, I forgive you. There is nothing I would not forgive you. I only love you more dearly."

For some minutes he remained in the same position, his head thrown back, repeating the words, and calling her name softly under his breath.

But he was conscious of no answer to his spirit cry. How could he reach her? He must speak; he had a message to give which would mean life to her. They could not keep him from her.

He left the room, and, crossing the hall, stole noiselessly up the stair. The night was oppressively warm and every door and window stood open to the air. When he reached the topmost step he saw Christina standing at the entrance to Angela's room.

There was an expression on her face which he had never seen before. She had always sent him from her with words of would-be comfort and hope; but this was

a look of terrified entreaty, and she warned him to come no nearer.

He stopped; but he did not turn and go, with his usual pathetic obedience. He stood his ground.

"I must!" he whispered, and he moved a step nearer.

Christina advanced also and barred his way. The expression of entreaty in her eyes vanished, and in its place flashed a light like that which might have flashed from the eyes of an angry lioness possessed by the primitive instinct of protective motherhood.

"No!" she whispered. And before her look he quailed, and turned, and went.

Who was there to help him? With a sickening sense of baffled strength, he wandered out into the garden and walked up and down, keeping the faintly lighted window above within his sight; raising his face to it, struggling with a passion of longing to send to her his message of love.

At length he felt that he could stand the strain no longer. He must know what was the meaning of that look in Christina's eyes.

How still the house was. He waited on the lowest step of the stair and listened.

He mounted slowly, until he stood again on the landing above, but no figure barred his way. There was not a sound of life; a deathly stillness hung on the hot, heavy air. The door of Angela's room stood open, and he crept near, and looked in.

The light was dim, and it was on Christina's figure that his eyes fell. A table was drawn up to the foot of the bed, and she was leaning her folded arms on it, and on her folded arms drooped her bowed head. Her face was hidden, but the attitude spoke of defeat, broken courage, a brave spirit vanquished.

On the great carved bed lay a little still white figure. The dark hair made a dusky shadow on the pillow, and the long lashes showed black against the waxen cheek.

Her arms were stretched out in front of her over the coverlet. Tired little arms, so weary of struggling. The upturned hands were open, as though pleading for the strong clasp they sought in vain. Empty arms! Empty pleading hands! She had tried to reach him, and he had been there; calling to her, beseeching heaven to tell her that his love and his forgiveness were hers—and she had not heard.

The smouldering sense of revolt against the justice of Nature's decree burst into a passion of frenzied remorse.

"She's dead! And it is my love that has killed her." And he turned and fled, as though the sword of the Avenging Angel were at his heels.

In the hall he stood staring round him—his hands clenched, his body stiff and tense.

There, on the wall, was her sickle. Another Reaper, with his grim sickle, had gathered in his sheaf that night.

He cursed the thing.

The old hound crept near and licked his hand, and he struck the touch of love from him.

On his strained ears fell a cry—the cry of the child, lustier and stronger than had been its first feeble protest to the world; there was life in the cry. That puny, fretful thing would live; and she had given her life for it. He had lost her for that!

Stumbling like a drunken man, he staggered to the open door, and out into the night. Whither could he go to escape from himself?

To the hills he fled—to the moors which he loved so well. The moon had risen and hung like a pale lamp in the dark blue vault of heaven. Unconsciously the light seemed to guide his steps, and he found himself on the lonely hill-side, where he had kept his vigil with his God on the eve of his wedding-day. He came to the spot where he had lain, and the memory of that night rushed back to him. The moonlight silvered the heather and touched with a magic wand each mountain top and craggy peak. All was the same! Nature: grand, terrible, coldly unapproachable in the majesty of her repose, held her silent court in the mystery of the night. And nothing cared—nothing heeded his despair.

Fiercer rose the tide of revolt within him. It was here that he had made his vows. Where were his hopes, his ideals? Where was the simple faith of his boyhood's trust? God had forgotten him; Nature was against him. Why had she been given him, the most precious of life's gifts, if such a beautiful thing as their love had been was to be turned against him?

He held up his arms to the moon-lit sky and called her name aloud.

"Angela, Angela!"

It could not be that her ears were deaf to his call. She must hear. A creature whose very being was the essence of life, and joy, and an exquisite vitality, could not die.

"My love, my love!" he cried. "I would have given my heart's blood for you."

But the pitiless skies, serene in their beauty, answered not.

"Nothing cares. There is no pity for me in heaven or earth."

And he threw himself, face downwards, on the heather, where he had lain before, and bit it with his strong young teeth like some dumb animal in the hands of its tormentor, until his lips were raw and bleeding, and the physical pain stung him anew to the agony of the aching void in his desolate heart.

The midnight hours crept on, and he dragged himself to his feet. He stood bareheaded, with his face to the eastern sky, where the dawn of another day would soon break.

The dawn! And he had lost his all.

"I cannot live without her!" and with his own despairing cry ringing in his ears, he fled before the wings of the night-wind.

CHAPTER XXXI

DAYBREAK found him still wandering far from home. When the sun rose high, and in its strength beat down on his uncovered head, the animal instinct for protection guided him, and he crept for shelter into the shadow of a great rock, and, throwing himself down on the damp ground, the merciful balm of sleep wrapped him in blessed unconsciousness.

How long he slept he knew not, and to where his wanderings led him when he awoke he paid little heed. It was late in the afternoon when he found himself standing on the brow of a hill above the clachan, looking down at the white house nestling amongst the trees by the loch-side.

He could not keep away from it. He must go back to it—the place where every association would be like hammering a nail into the chords of memory.

He was faint for want of food, dishevelled, and wild-eyed; clotted streaks of peat-slime stuck to his kilt where he had lain on the wet ground; but a sullen kind of despair held him almost oblivious of anything except a dog-like instinct to retrace his steps homewards. As he descended the sheep-track which wound down the face of the hill-side, his dazed sight saw only the turf at his feet; he stumbled along with his head down, and the first consciousness that a human being was near him

was when a voice called his name, and he raised his eyes to see Flossie coming up the path to meet him.

He stared, in a kind of apathetic wonder. It was undoubtedly Flossie, and his appearance was so ordinary and matter-of-fact, and savoured so forcibly of the material. His round, pink face wore its characteristic expression of fresh candour; but as his gaze rested on Jock, a look of wondering pity came into his eyes, and he checked the words which rose to his lips.

Could this haggard man with the blood-shot eyes be the gallant bridegroom whom he had seen bear off his love in the pride of his strong young manhood on his wedding-day?

The look of passionate adoration on Jock's face when Angela had put the bridle into his hand, when they were starting on their romantic honeymoon, and said "You are to lead always," had touched a tender chord in Flossie's heart; and the memory of it had never faded.

With his eyes still full of pitying wonder, he drew a step nearer.

"My dear boy," he said kindly, "where have you been? They have been scouring the place for you."

Jock stared at him vacantly. He expressed no surprise at this unlooked-for meeting. He only stared at first, and then something familiar in the appearance of the figure before him struck on his dulled brain. Flossie was wearing the same kind of clothes as he had worn at Angela's wedding, a dark blue serge suit, and the triviality of the small coincidence stirred a note of memory.

He spoke.

"You said, 'If you let harm come to her—by the Lord, I'll slay you.' Do you remember? Have you come to keep your word?"

His voice was tuneless and hollow, as though all the springs of life had withered and run dry.

The expression of pity and wonder on Flossie's face deepened.

Jock swayed, and took an unsteady step forward.

"Hi! hold up!" exclaimed Flossie, and caught a firm grip of the stumbling figure.

He glanced round. A slab of flat rock lay near, and he led Jock to it.

"Sit down," he said, as though he were speaking to a child, and he felt for something in his pocket, and finding his flask, filled the cup and held it out. "Drink that; it will pull you together."

Jock obeyed mechanically. This little, pink-faced man could be very dominating.

He gave back the empty cup, and dropped his head into his hands. His senses began to awaken under the influence of the stimulant to the intolerable anguish of the present.

Flossie left him alone until he looked up of his own accord.

"Better?" he asked. "Have some more?" and he held up the flask.

Jock drew back, like a sensitive plant touched by a rude hand. The pleasant, well-bred voice, the easy manner, the prosaicness of the words, stung and roused him.

He looked round.

The sun was shining, and the wide moor lay basking in the strong light. The bees were busy in the heather beside him; a lark carolled in the blue sky overhead; the crow of a cock grouse came down on the faint breeze from the ridge above.

He turned his head slowly, and his gaze came back to Flossie's face.

"All the same. Everything going on exactly the same, and—she's dead."

He dropped his head again into his hands.

Flossie uttered a smothered exclamation, and the flask slipped through his fingers.

"Dead! The boy's crazed."

He hesitated, and then said:

"Why do you say that?"

"Didn't you know? I thought you had come to reproach me."

The husky voice lagged a little.

"I loved her—I'd have given my heart's blood for her. She's dead—my love has killed her. And the child lives. Her life for——" And he broke off.

Flossie laid his hand on the bowed shoulders.

"My dear boy, she's not dead. Why do you say that?"

Jock turned away from the kindly touch, a pathetic protest in the action. What was the use of torturing him?

"She's dead," he said drearily. "You don't know. You didn't see. I knew they were deceiving me, and—I went up—no one heard me. I looked in—the door was open, and I saw——"

Flossie pulled him round and forced him to meet his eyes.

"You saw her sleeping," he said, slowly and distinctly. "She was asleep—a blessed sleep which has saved her life."

"Sleep—sleep!" echoed Jock, in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes, sleep," said Flossie.

Jock gripped the arm next him.

"Oh Lord!" murmured Flossie, wincing. "I didn't think he had enough left in him for that."

"Sleep—say that again."

Jock's voice rang out with a new strength.

Flossie managed to free himself from the vice-like grip. He smiled whimsically, but there were tears in his eyes, for his heart was filled with an immense pity.

He gave Jock's shoulder a forcible shake; something that he could feel physically.

"She's alive, man. Do you hear? Take my word for it that it's true." He pointed down the track. "I've just come up from the house there, where she's sleeping peacefully like a child, and I've been speaking to that noble woman, I don't know her name, who's nursed her; and she says——"

Jock had sprung to his feet.

"What are you going to do?" exclaimed Flossie, catching at his kilt before he got out of reach.

"I'm going to her!" cried Jock.

"No, you don't!" answered Flossie; and he hung on to the tough pleat of tartan.

"But I must!"

"No, I say you must not!"

Jock still tried to free himself.

"I tell you I must see her. I know what she's been breaking her heart over. I know what's been nearly sending her off her head—what she's been trying to tell me. I know she wants me."

Flossie dragged him back with a violent jerk.

"You can't see her. Keep away from her for God's sake! Her life's hanging on a thread, and if she hears your step, or catches a whisper of your voice, it will waken her, and sleep's her salvation."

Jock gave a groan, as he was pulled down on to the rock from which he had sprung. He turned jealously on Flossie.

"Have you seen her?" he asked.

"Seen her? No! I only got here a couple of hours ago. But I've seen that grim-looking doctor—and the woman that's nursed her. They're a grand pair. My poor little girl—my poor little girl!"

Flossie took out his pocket-handkerchief and blew his nose. He was not ashamed to show his emotion, and it somehow calmed Jock to see how affected he was. When Jock spoke again, it was in a subdued tone, touching in its humility.

"Has she—did they—— Do you know if she has asked for me?"

Flossie nodded.

"Yes. That gave them the first tip that she was all right—when she woke up from that first long sleep. Oh, I know. Don't bother to explain." He made a gesture with his hand, checking Jock's words. "I understand all about it. She had got something on her mind. Her poor little head, you know. And the fever had got into it. Good Lord! Do you think I don't know. There—there! It's all right. But it was playing the very devil with her. My poor little girl."

Flossie, usually so glib with his tongue, jerked out his words spasmodically. He blew his nose again, and then rammed his handkerchief into his pocket.

There was a long silence, which neither man tried to break. It seemed to Jock as though his spirit had been brought down to the deepest depth of self-abasement. His soul was steeped in the waters of humiliation. He could not put into words his gratitude for the mercy which had been extended to him. He groped blindly for light to understand.

"I am not worthy—I am not worthy," he murmured.

He had been sitting with his face hidden. He

raised it. The boyishness seemed to have been washed out of it. The struggle through which he had passed had marked it with lines which no years could give, nor time take away. The great Teacher of life had written on it a new lesson.

"I am brought down to the dust," he said slowly. "I am humbled to the dust by the mercy which I have not deserved."

He pointed to the hills.

"Last night I fled from what I thought was God's injustice, with a curse on my lips. I went from the room where I thought I had seen her lying dead, and I heard the child cry, and I cursed it. My dog came up to me, and I spurned him. I went out into the night, with hatred and rebellion raging in my heart. I had always felt so sure of myself; that my faith was strong enough to stand: but I had never been tried before. When I was struck at through her—I fell. She was made to suffer through me. She was given to me. God gave her to me to protect and cherish and love; and the power to do it was taken from me. I had to stand helpless and know that my pride in my strength, and the boast that I could keep her dear feet from even a thorn-prick, was naught. I could see no justice in anything. God and Nature had lied to me."

His head drooped again; his voice hardly rose to a whisper.

"My soul has been in hell! How can I work out my repentance? I am not worthy that she should be given back to me."

Flossie was looking straight in front of him, but the view was blurred although the sun shone. His voice was as husky as Jock's when he answered.

"The best of us are riding for a fall when we back our souls against—a woman. And—well, thank God, there are women worth it."

He said nothing more for a long time; and then, quite unconsciously, for he was still gazing into space, he took his cigarette-case out of his pocket and abstractedly snapped the catch.

The trivial sound made Jock look up. He moved uneasily, and his glance wavered from Flossie's face to where the chimneys of the house showed through a gap in the trees below.

"Don't you think I might go down now?" he asked. "If it was only to see Christina. I won't make a noise. I'm so accustomed to being quiet. I won't let her hear me."

Flossie snapped the clasp of his cigarette-case, this time with intention, and offered Jock a cigarette, but Jock shook his head.

Flossie felt for his match-box.

"Christina, did you say? Is that her name? Well, yes, I think you might see Christina. She won't let you do anything rash."

He paused in the act of striking a match and looked Jock up and down.

"Take my advice, and go and have a tub and change, and get a good square meal inside you before you do anything else. When she wakes, she's bound to ask for you, and—she'd jolly soon spot the fact that you'd been out all night, and wonder what the dickens you'd been up to."

Jock looked down at the stains of peat-bog on his kilt, and passed his hand over his roughened hair.

"Yes," he said, "I'll go and change." He took a step away, and then halted.

"I haven't even thanked you for coming out to look for me," he said. "Where are you stopping? Can't I do anything for you?"

Flossie laughed.

"Never mind me," he answered. "I'm all right. I'm provided for. I fell in with your minister. A godly, excellent man, and he's given me an invitation to hang up my hat in his—what do you call it?—manse."

Jock's brow cleared.

"I'm afraid everything's rather upset," he said apologetically.

"Little strangers generally do upset the apple-cart," said Flossie blandly. "But—don't you bother about me. I'm going to stop here for a bit and smoke a cigarette. I'll look you up when I want anything. But remember! Angela doesn't know I'm here. Mum's the word. She mustn't be fussed."

He watched the tall, broad-shouldered figure go swinging down the narrow track. Jock's buoyancy of step had returned, and the blood was sending hope and courage pulsing through his veins.

"He's a good 'un. The child was right; she knew her man," mused Flossie, as he smoked meditatively, and his glance wandered over the scene before him.

"A fine inheritance," he murmured. "And it's all right between them—that's clear."

He finished his cigarette, and taking a letter out of his pocket, read it slowly. He looked at the signature absently for a moment or two, and then laid the letter open on the grass in front of him, and lit a fresh cigarette.

"Beauty! you're a damned fool," he remarked aloud. "You don't care a brass farthing for the woman. The god Mammon! Thank the Lord, my little girl's safe."

He blew out a cloud of smoke, and watched it drift into thin vapour. Stooping, he turned over another sheet of the paper and read:

"Monty Potter won't defend his case—he can't. So Dolly will get her release without inconvenient publicity."

Flossie put his foot on the open page, and went on smoking.

The shades of evening were falling. It was again that gathering time of dusk "'twixt the gloamin' and the mirk"; and Jock stood at the open window and watched the slowly darkening sky. It was only the night before that he had stood there and watched the day die. It seemed to him that he had lived a lifetime between then and now.

Angela had awakened, and had asked for him, and he was waiting for Christina to take him to her. Then he would mount the steep stairs; not to find a menacing figure barring his way, but to find his love watching for him. He would not be met by terror-haunted eyes and piteous pleadings which would cut him to the heart; the fever had left her, and, with her wonderful vitality, life was bounding back to her with every throb of quickening pulse.

Jock had just parted from Doctor Angus, and his fingers still tingled from the grasp of his handshake. The grim-faced man, with the heart as tender as a child's, had turned aside all expressions of gratitude with a hasty: "It was Christina. I couldn't have won through without Christina." And he had wrung Jock's hand, and clambered into his high dog-cart, and driven out into the darkness on some fresh mission of healing.

Christina entered the room so quietly that he did not hear her, for he was talking softly to Dileas, who

was resting his head, with dog-like forgiveness, on the hand that had spurned him. A quick pang of fear caught him, for he saw that there were tears in Christina's eyes.

But Christina smiled reassuringly.

"It's only thankfulness, dearie," she said. "Sheila's giving the dear lamb her supper. And when I told her she must finish it all up so as to be strong to see you, she looked at me that sweet-like that I couldn't help the tears coming." Christina wiped her eyes. "To think that this time last night my heart was failing me for fear. And now——"

"This time last night," repeated Jock in a low voice.

Christina looked at him gravely for a moment.

"I'm going to tell you something very strange," she said, and her full, deep voice trembled a little. "It was just at the gloamin' last night. I had been watching her in fear, for I saw that she was sore distressed. She was plucking at the sheet, and her voice was so low that I couldn't hear right, but it was your name that she was calling on. She was too weak to raise herself on her pillow, and her arms were weak too; but suddenly, and it made my heart stand still with fear, I saw her stretch them out quite strong like, and she tried to speak. Her eyes were wide open, and you could see that she was looking—listening, like as she was waiting for an answer to something. And then, I that was watching saw a great change come over her dear face. The strained, frightened look faded away, and a kind of radiance spread over it. Oh, it was beautiful, dearie! Just as if an angel had kissed her, and given her peace."

Christina paused to wipe the tears from her cheeks again.

"I feared—I feared sore to think what it meant; and yet I hoped. And then, as I watched, I saw her eyes gradually close, and she kind of settled down as if sleep had fallen on her. When I listened, her breathing was quiet and natural, and my heart nearly burst out of my bosom with thankfulness, for I knew that sleep would save her. It was strange, dearie, wasn't it? It gave me the thought that something must have uplifted her spirit, and swept the fever from her brain; for when she woke up she was her dear sweet self again."

Jock drew in a deep breath. He did not question Christina; he had no need of what had happened in that room the night before. The great mercy which had been shown to him seemed a thing too sacred for speech. He had been allowed to help his darling.

Standing almost on the spot where he now was, he had lifted up his arms and prayed that he might be allowed to send her his message of love and forgiveness; and his spirit had reached her spirit.

He bowed his head. He had distrusted—he had scorned his faith; and yet he was to be allowed to take up his life anew; and the sacred charge of another life was to be given into his hands.

"That was the turning-point," continued Christina. "Do you mind how I sent you away yon time you came up? I must have looked fierce; but it was to save her. If she had been wakened then it might have been her death. It was the sleep that saved her."

"I came up again," said Jock. "You did not see me. You had your head down—lying on your folded arms; and then I saw her, and—I thought——"

Christina smiled rather wanly. Her tired face was lined by anxious hours of nursing.

"She was asleep then, and I must have dropped off myself just for a few minutes. I was wearied, and I remember laying my head down to say a bit prayer of thankfulness, and I must have dropped off. It was only a few minutes. But you've such a light foot, dearie; I never heard you come in. You must forgive me. It was only a few minutes."

"Oh, Christina! Did you think I was reproaching you?" cried Jock; and he threw his arms round her neck and kissed her with the impetuosity which had characterised his rare outbursts of boyish affection.

"You've nearly killed yourself," he declared. "But you've saved her. No one could have done it but you."

A gentle voice was heard calling from the top of the stairs.

"That's Sheila," said Christina. "She was to cry on me when the dear pet had finished her supper. I'll take you up now."

Her foot was on the step of the stair, when she hesitated, and looking at Jock said, with a note of warning in her voice:

"Sick folk get queer notions into their heads. Take all that she says without any questioning. Just pretend you know. Say 'yes' whenever you think she wants you to say 'yes,' and never mind whether you know a thing's real or not if she thinks it's real."

"I know! I understand! said Jock. "How long may I stay?"

Christina smiled.

"I think you'll know that for yourself."

CHAPTER XXXII

SHE lay like a little winter snowdrop which had struggled through the dark and cold, and come out into the sunshine, and was resting its drooping head upon a soft bed of snow. Everything about her was snow-white, except the dark halo of her hair against the pillow. Her eyes looked woefully big; but they shone like stars, and they clung to his face and followed him as, obeying Christina's sign, he passed round at the foot of the great carved bed to the side where she lay. A chair was drawn close, and he was grateful; for at the sight of her dear face, and the eager, anxious love in her eyes, a sudden weakness made his limbs tremble, and something seemed to catch at his heart and drain the blood from it.

He bent his head down to the pillow and his lips touched her hair. The faint scent of violets clung to it, and breathed soft fragrance from all about her. With a stifled sob he tried to hide his face against the little curls which clustered about her ears.

She murmured his name, but he could not speak, and she lay still for a few moments and then whispered:

"Put your arm under me and lift me up. I want to feel my head in the old place."

He raised her until she lay with her head pillowed in the hollow of his shoulder.

"Kiss me," she said. And he kissed her on the brow and lips. She looked so fragile that he feared lest his softest touch might be too rough. The weight of her body against his breast seemed no heavier than a snowflake. But he held her; he could feel her. She had been given back to him.

She drew a long, sighing breath, and closed her eyes. The dark lashes fluttered, and she looked up again.

"You did not kiss me when you came to me before." Her voice was weak and low, but the old sweet thrill vibrated through it. Her eyes went to the empty space at the foot of the bed between the carved pillars. "You stood there, and you spoke to me, but you did not come and kiss me."

"I—I——" Jock checked himself. He remembered Christina's warning. "I was afraid to kiss you," he said, and he touched her hair again with his lips. "You were asleep—I was afraid to waken you."

She smiled.

"It would not have hurt me. But I understood." Her eyes searched his face, eagerly, pleadingly. "You have quite forgiven me, haven't you?"

"My darling, there was nothing to forgive."

She sighed, another long sigh of content.

"That was what you said. I had been so unhappy because I had not been able to tell you my secret. I was always struggling and struggling to tell you. It was like a dreadful nightmare. I was so frightened that I would never be able to tell you; my head was always burning, and I could not find the proper words. And—once you came—and I was not ready, and—I was afraid of you." Her brow puckered in a line of pain. "My head is still so stupid that I cannot remember how I told you. But—I explained, didn't I? You know why

I did it? It was because I loved you so; and because—— You do know everything, don't you?"

"Everything," he answered.

"And you forgive me?"

"There was nothing to forgive, my darling."

"Ah! Now I remember. You said that. I had been trying so hard to tell you. And then—suddenly I seemed to waken out of that dreadful nightmare, and I saw you standing there at the foot of the bed, between the pillars. Those dreadful pillars that had always mocked at me, and told me you were angry and would not forgive me. And you held out your arms, and you said—— What was it? Oh, my head is so stupid! Yes, I know. You said: 'My darling, I forgive you. There is nothing I would not forgive you.' I can hear you saying it. Your voice was very low and clear and there was that intent look in your eyes that I love so."

She paused to take breath. And he told her that she was not to tire her dear head with trying to remember.

"But I love to remember. It comforted me so, to see you standing there—even although you did not kiss me. I stretched out my arms to you, and you said it all over again. It was like a kind of blessing, and then I seemed to drift away into a beautiful dream. I think that I have been dreaming ever since, but I am awake now." She pressed her cheek against the breast of his coat. "This—makes me feel that it is real. If you only knew what a relief it is to be quite sure that you know. And you have forgiven me—everything?"

"Quite sure," he answered. "How could you ever think that I would not forgive you for loving me—so much better than I deserve?"

"You deserve everything." She raised her head, her weak voice gained a little of its pretty, quick vehemence. "You deserve everything," she repeated. "You would never have behaved in the selfish, deceitful way that I did. You are so good and strong. Dearest, do you remember when we sat together on the knoll that Sunday afternoon, and you told me about the sermon? 'He set his face stedfastly.' That was the text. That is what you would always do. You would set your face stedfastly to do what was right. However much you loved me, you would never have made an idol of your love. You would never have put me before what was right."

She felt the muscles of the strong arms which held her tremble.

"But I did. I put you before—God and my soul. Nothing else mattered. I put you before everything," he said brokenly.

Something wet fell on her cheek. She moved her head and looked up at him, and raising her arms, she clasped them round his neck.

"My poor dear," she whispered, "I know—I know just how you feel. It is so dreadfully difficult not to love too much. Isn't it?"

She laid her cheek against his, breathing sweet comfort into his ear.

"It is not that we have loved each other too much. It is that we have not given our love room to grow big enough. That is it. Don't you think so? We will begin all over again. It is comforting to know that we are both the same. It will make us humble. And now that there is no secret—that you know everything, we will try to do some good with our love—if we are allowed," she added.

She lay still: the long lashes drooped low, and, watching her, he wondered if she had fallen asleep. He bent to listen to her breathing, and she opened her eyes, wide and bright.

"You—you have not said a word—not a word about your son."

She spoke very quickly, and a faint tinge of colour stained the whiteness of her cheeks.

"I—haven't——" Jock halted and stammered. She saved him unwittingly by her eagerness.

"Were you dreadfully disappointed when you saw how small he was?"

"No! Oh no! I was so glad that—— He's all right, dear."

"He is very tiny, of course," she said anxiously. "But that was not his fault, and Christina says she has seen far tinier babies grow into great strong men. I do so want him to be like you. I was allowed to hold him to-day. Perhaps my arms are not very strong, but he felt quite heavy—and he cried, oh, ever so loud."

"He's got a wonderfully strong voice," said Jock, catching at the straw held out to him.

"Yes, hasn't he? I'm so glad. That shows that he's strong, doesn't it?"

She smiled radiantly, and then her mouth drooped.

"He's got a foster-mother. I'm so jealous of her. Isn't it dreadful that I am such a useless little thing that I can't even mother my own child?"

She moved restlessly, her fingers playing with the lace of her sleeve.

"Jock," she said beseechingly, "don't you think you could steal him from that woman? I want him so dreadfully badly."

"My—my dear!" said Jock.

Her weak fingers closed over his hand.

"I'm his mother," she said, and her hold tightened. "His real mother! And, Jock, I do so want to see him in your arms."

Jock hesitated.

"Ought I to leave you? Shall I call Christina?"

"No, no," she implored. "We don't want any one—just our two selves, and our little baby. Do go and bring him to me? I will be so good. Look! I will shut my eyes and lie quite still and not move a finger until you come back."

He still doubted, and she flashed up at him one of her mocking smiles of sweet raillery.

"You for a Highlander! Not to know how to steal your own son."

He laid her down gently and left the room, outwardly calm, but inwardly filled with trepidation. Christina was nowhere to be seen, but Sheila proved a willing accomplice to the theft. She placed the small white bundle in his arms, and came with him to the foot of the stairs to make sure that he did not want any help, and watched him out of sight with a glad light in her soft dark eyes.

In spite of her promise to lie quite still, Angela was alert and watching. And when she saw Jock and what he carried, her lips parted in a tremulous little gasp.

Very cautiously, in fear lest the precious bundle should slip through his fingers, he laid the child in her arms. She drew back the shawl in which it was wrapped, and bent over her treasure, crooning soft wordless little noises, of which Jock could only dimly understand the meaning.

The baby was asleep, and looked placidly peaceful.

It had lost something of the pathos of immaturity; the microscopic nose and mouth and little pink face were suggestive of crumpled rose leaves and a newly fledged bird.

Angela gazed at the small atom of humanity in a rapture of adoration. She lifted her face, all flushed and quivering, to Jock's. The love-light in her eyes was for him, and of the mother-love he was not jealous.

"Lift us both up higher," she said, and he raised her in his arms.

"Now you must kiss him," she said. "Just there—on his cheek. You must be very careful, because there isn't much room."

And Jock kissed his son.

"You really are proud of him, although he is so small?" she asked anxiously. "You will love him, won't you? You are not jealous of him?"

"No, I'm not jealous of him. I'm proud of him, dear. I love to see him like that in your arms."

"We can never grow hard and make our love a selfish thing when we have this. Can we?" she said.

For answer he drew her very close, and kissed the sleeping child again of his own accord.

She looked up at him, smiling tenderly, and then touched with her lips the downy head lying cradled on her bosom.

"My little Bawbee," she murmured softly.

THE END

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